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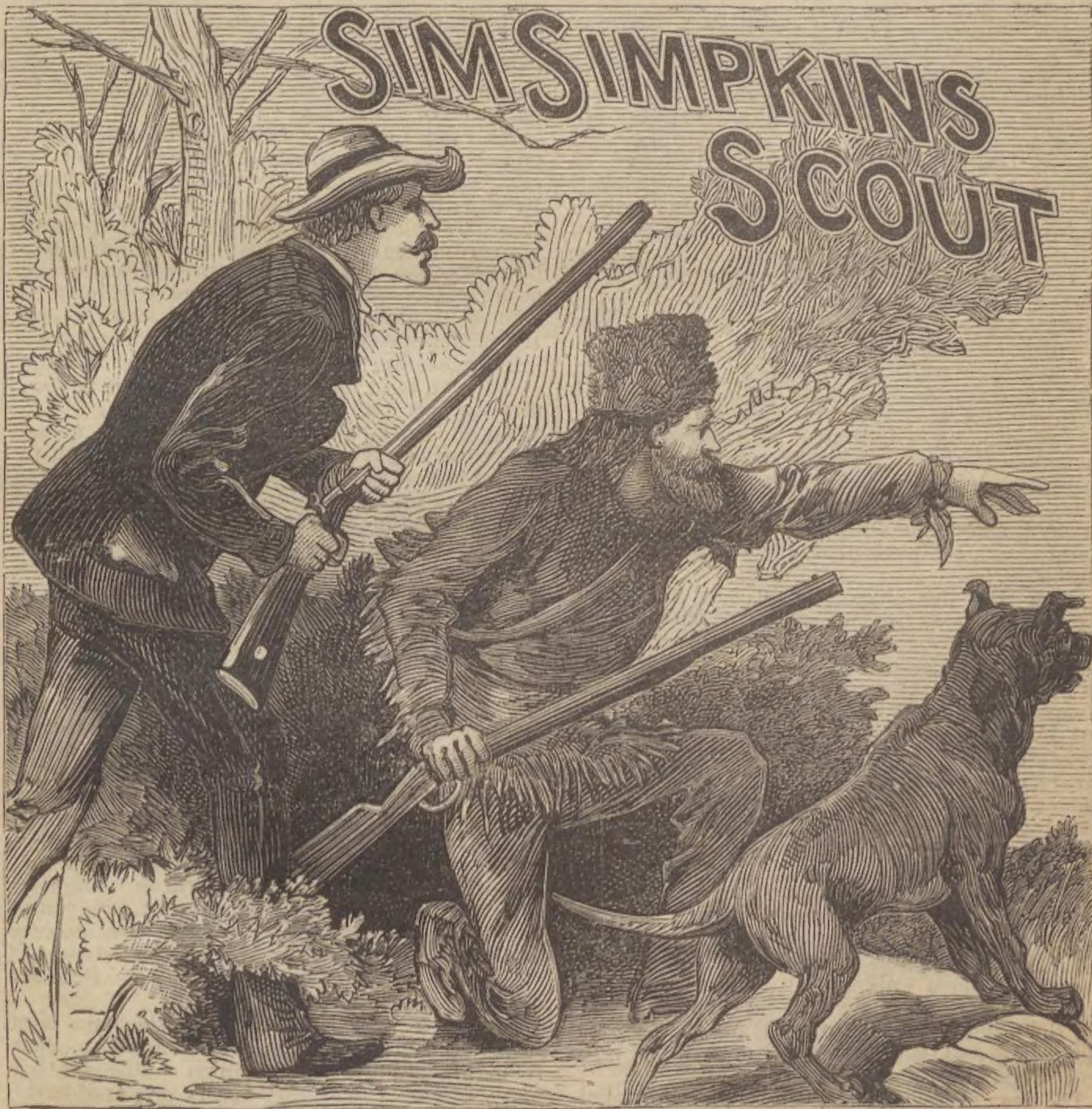
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"NOW THEN, SHEW'T RIGHT OFF THROUGH HERE," SAID SIMPKINS, INDICATING THE PROPER DIRECTION
TO HIS COMPANION. "HOLD YER FIRE TILL I SAY READY. AND THEN BLAZE AWAY."

Sim Simpkins, Scout;

OR,

The Faithful Mountain Mastiff.

BY JAMES L. BOWEN.

CHAPTER I.

JOURNEYING FOR THE FOREST HOME.

FAR away from the busy haunts of men, where only Indian and wild beast might have taken up their abode in times past, but of whose presence the grand forest gave no indications—where huge forest monarchs had sprung up and grown to great stature, to brave the storms of centuries, and finally sink again upon the bosom of that proud mother from whom they had sprung—where a bubbling spring had gushed forth, and its little rivulet trickled down the side of the mountain and away over plains till it became a mighty river—where animal and insect gamboled in the freedom and safety of uninvaded haunts, bounding hither and thither in ignorance of that subtle danger which was pressing toward them, and making their species every day scarcer and more valuable upon the face of the earth—where the solitude of nature and the rich wildness of the mountain forest-scenery were such as to attract the reflective mind at once toward the great Architect of unnumbered worlds—repose the group to which we would call attention.

The ground at this particular point was hilly, rising in wavy undulations to the height of twenty or thirty feet, heavily covered with virgin forest, and watered by a delightful stream, which ran in zig-zags hither and thither, affording place of habitation to immense numbers of the finny tribe. Away to the northward the hills rose into bold, heavy mountains, and, far as the eye could reach, the horizon was bounded by their blue tops.

Such was the physical aspect of the place. Around a cheery fire, whose bright blaze might be seen far through the forest, were seated three men, engaged in conversing and roasting some fine fish, which the adjacent stream had just given them, almost without an effort. A rude hut of boughs had been built near them, within which could be seen the forms of two ladies, earnestly engaged in conversation. Two wagons stood at a little distance, beside each of which a span of horses were quietly eating the forage which had been provided for them.

The reader will hardly need to be told that this was an emigrant party upon a small scale, journeying through the wide regions of our own great West, seeking a home nearer the Occident. They had reached their present camping place about an hour previous. After discharging their various duties—including the building of the bush hut for the two women—they had caught a supply of fish, and were now preparing them in their own style.

The first, seated near the fire, and slowly turning an improvised spit, is Luman Leonard, principal man in the group. He has seen somewhat more than fifty years—years of change

and vicissitude. East and West he has been a wanderer for quite two-score years, but now he has made a final determination; and, with his family, is on his way to a new home, far in the western wilds. Those two wagons contain all his earthly effects, as well as those of another of whom we will speak soon.

Luman Leonard was not a man of very decided character, and that trait was fully expressed in his features. Thus it was that, at his age of life, he still continued a wanderer upon the face of the earth. A will more powerful than his own could sway and mold him like clay in the hands of the potter. And yet, at times, there was a seeming determination about him amounting almost to stubbornness. In a word he was whimsical and eccentric.

Seated near him was a lad, fifteen years of age, tall and somewhat ungainly in form, though his appearance betokened much energy and great strength for one of his years. He was busily engaged with a huge jack-knife, carving fanciful designs in wood, occasionally casting his great, gray eyes about him, into the darkness of the forest.

At a short distance from the others, also engaged in the preparation of their piscatory repast, sat a young man of five-and-twenty years. In essentials he differed much from both of those by whom he was flanked. In personal appearance he was about the middle size, rather light of build, but with full muscular development. His dress was neat and carefully arranged, though with no show of vain display. His features were regular, and a light of steady intelligence burned in his dark eyes. His hair and beard, both of which were worn full and flowing, were of a dark, glossy brown. Taken all in all, Frank Sherman was just the man to lead captive the heart of a romantic maiden.

And rumor said that no other reason had taken him away into the western wilds with Luman Leonard and his family. For—

Seated within the rude bower already mentioned, were two women, the general resemblance between whom was sufficient to establish their relation as mother and daughter, at a glance.

The elder, a woman of perhaps forty-five, whose features showed many traces of care, if not of positive sorrow, was Maria, the wife of Luman Leonard. She had evidently been a beauty in her youth, but with sad results to herself. That beauty had attracted the notice of a purposeless, vacillating man, and for more than twenty years she had followed his uncertain fortunes to the present day.

The other, a fresh, blooming, beautiful maiden of twenty, was Cora Leonard, the daughter. The rare loveliness of the mother had descended in full share to her. But wisdom and beauty had joined bands in the present instance, and Cora was already possessed of more than an ordinary share of discretion.

It was a year since Frank Sherman first formed her acquaintance, and long before their removal, had become an open suitor for her hand. When the family finally prepared to depart, and Frank cast his lot with theirs, it was deemed proof positive that his wooing had not been all in vain.

"Now, what a supper these fish would make, cook 'em up in style, and hev a little table tew eat 'em off on," said Leonard, after a time of unusual silence. But, if a feller's got tew move, he's got to expect to fare rough. Bless my stars, this ends my hoistin' round hereaway! No purtier place in my opinion than this fur our new home. I say here we pitches our tent."

Frank Sherman looked up for a moment, as though he would like to congratulate his companion upon his resolution; but if so he did not venture to do so, merely replying:

"These are very fine fish; we seldom had any as good where we used to live."

"That's a fact. Give me the West, if a feller wants to live, and take some comfort of his life. Well, just look at these fish; every thing else is in proportion. And then the land—a month's work hereabout will raise a man's livin' for a year. And what you raise you can calculate on hevin' yerself. There ain't plaguey gangs of thieves organized and unorganized, to pick up every thing that they can lay their hands on. Here if a feller's sick 'tain't quite so pleasant, but then, ye ain't so likely to be sick!"

Having thus demonstrated, to his own satisfaction, the advantages of the region which they had then reached on the "borders of civilization," Leonard began to slowly gather up the fish that were quite ready for the feast to be made of them. Frank Sherman followed his example, and both were preparing to transport their luscious dishes to the table extemporized on the ground near the wagons, when a new party arrived upon the scene.

They were barely conscious that some person came bounding through the forest, and dashed by them, but were recalled to life and action at seeing the brands from their blazing fire hurled in every direction.

"Stop!" exclaimed Frank, grasping the intruder by one arm, when he had sufficiently recovered from the surprise of so sudden an act. "What is the meaning of all this?"

"Don't stop ter ask questions," shouted the stranger, freeing himself from Frank's grasp by a quick movement. "If ye don't want tew lose the skin o' yer heads jest take holt and put out this fire."

And without any intermission he proceeded to scatter the blazing brands.

"But we want to know what you mean; what you are doing this for," said Frank, slightly angered, producing a pistol from his belt.

"Don't show such tools to me," returned the intruder, with perfect *nonchalance*. "You'll find plenty of other use for 'em. The Injins are all abroad, and this woods is full of 'em, not five mile from here. If they once git a sight o' this fire, ye may as well hev yer prayers said, beforehand."

The young man blanched visibly at the news, and stood for a moment regarding the speaker with doubt.

"Is that a fact?" he finally demanded.

"Ye don't mean to accuse me of lyin' tew ye, I hope?" was the sharp question which met his own.

"Not in the least," returned Frank, without

any hesitation. "But I thought it quite possible you might be joking with us. I was not aware that we were within the Indians' Reservation, nor that the savages were hostile."

"Horse-tile, is it? I guess they are; never seen 'em wuss in my life, and I've foltered the woods for near thirty years. They killed off my old chum, Billy Larkin, day afore yesterday, and I've been a tryin' tew pay 'em off sence."

Thus far Luman Leonard had stood agape, listening to the revelations of his singular visitor. But now he came in front of him, and demanded:

"Is this Indian country?"

"In course it are! All this side of the mountains is their territory."

"What in the world's it best fer a feller to dew in that case, stranger?"

The person addressed turned a searching lock upon the speaker, and then replied, slowly:

"I don't know what ye want to dew. But if ye want tew git off with yer life, and the lives o' yer friends ye'd better hitch up yer hosses, and git oack toward the Missasipp as fast as ye can go."

"Would ye go to-night?"

"To-night or not, jest as ye kin afford. But one thing I'll tell ye for sart'in—ye'll go to-night or never. I happened to spy yer fire, and left my dog to watch the Injins while I cut off this way and put it out. Now ye've got fair warnin', ye kin dew just as ye're a mind tew about savin' the skin o' yer heads."

"Well, I declare, I don't know what to dew," repeated Luman, once or twice. "You say the Injins hev riz?"

"I didn't say. But if ye are goin' to save any o' yer dewin's what's aboard o' them wagins, ye'd better hitch up and be makin' tracks back. For I kin tell ye 'twon't be long afore they'll be here. I've left my dog Pinchers tew watch 'em, and he'll bring us word when they git tew near. So, if ye're goin', be about it, and I'll go along with ye a piece an' tell ye more o' the particullars; but I ain't goin' tew dally here a great while."

"What shall we dew, Frank?" asked Leonard, hesitating in his own mind. "What d'ye say, women—shall we turn round and go back?"

If the stranger's story could be relied upon it was wisdom for them to flee immediately; and such a depth of rough sincerity pervaded his actions that with one accord they advised a retreat.

"Well, come, Alvin; I s'pose we'd better hitch up if we're goin'," said the parent, addressing his son.

"So I s'pose," was the drawling reply. "But it does seem pesky hard tew leave afore I git a chance tew try my old 'Bunker Hill' on 'em once."

"I reckon you'll hev all the chance to try 'em you'll want, if you don't hurry up a little more'n you hev done," responded the stranger. "Now, either put them hosses on in double-quick time, or else leave 'em, for it's my idee the Injins ain't a-goin' tew sleep but tew winks to-night."

Constant urging on the part of the stranger, coupled with Frank's earnest endeavors, finally

succeeded in getting the horses attached to the wagons, such goods as had been removed replaced, and the party in readiness to set forth.

CHAPTER II.

THE HUNTER.

"ON there, and off ye go, whoever's goin' tew drive!" shouted the stranger, when the ladies had been carefully stowed away in the forward wagon.

Alvin Leonard answered the summons, and gathered up the lines, preparatory to a start. The second team being attached to the rear of the first wagon, and trained to travel in that style, required no separate driver. The boy's father and Frank, therefore, took their rifles and walked along in the rear of the little train, not only to lighten the wagons but to guard them more effectually.

"You needn't be any afear'd o' Injins," remarked the strange scout, seeing his companions glance around apprehensively. "I've got a dog thar watchin' 'em, what'll bring us word afore there is any danger from 'em."

"One that has been trained to Indian-fighting, I should judge," said Frank.

"That's so. He's been with me eight year last August, and I dew say, if I'd got to take my pick between any man I ever seen and that dog tew help me in a tight place, I should take the dog. True as ye live. But I've knowed some good men for that same job; Billy Larkin was jist as fine a feller as ever ye see. Not so quick-witted as some, but jist show him a piece of re l-skin as big as yer thumb-nail, and if he wouldn't put a rifle-ball through it, anywhere within fifty rods, ye may sell me for a gourd. But, poor Billy—the cusses finished him at last, and I've been payin' 'em off for two days. It's been a dear job to 'em, and they hain't got over it yit. Poor Billy! Him and me had trapped and hunted and fit togetaer for near four years, and he seemed like a brother tew me. Oh, the consarned heathin! I'll make 'em sup sorrer jist for that same thing!"

The scout clinched his hand, and bit his teeth together violently. As they walked on in the soft starlight, winding about amid the hills, they were enabled to observe the person and appearance of the stranger more closely than at the moment of his arrival.

In person he was tall and lank, but possessing immense muscular development. His long arms, swinging loosely at his side, had the appearance of bundles of thew and sinew. His garb was coarse and worn, formed in a great degree of the prepared skins of animals, some with and some without the hair. Warm and uncomfortable as this garb might be for summer wear, it was very well adapted to the cooler seasons, and as it was yet early in the spring, he had not laid it aside.

In one hand he sported a ponderous rifle, which very few men could have held out steadily, yet he regarded it as a boy might regard a stick, tossing it hither and thither with the utmost carelessness. In his belt stuck a large knife, and a pair of pistols, while horn and pouch were slung over his shoulder in the usual style of his class.

But all these were ordinary features; it was

none of them which fixed the attention of Frank Sherman. For some time he sought in vain to find the puzzling feature. He surveyed the face of the stranger by the starlight, and wondered what made him seem so singular.

True, his countenance was long and thin, the lower portion of it being covered by a bristling beard. The mouth was completely concealed beneath the hairy trap, and above it appeared the outlines of a prominent nose. Then he looked at the eyes. Ah! There it was!

The stranger had but one eye!

The other was sunken, and the brow and lids were contracted about it so as to partially fill the cavity. From the socket a broad scar extended back nearly to the ear on that side, showing that some dangerous chance had deprived the hunter of that useful member. The remaining orb, which was of a keen gray, burned and sparkled with the fire of an unrelenting purpose. It seemed to Frank Sherman that he had never seen a human eye whose glance was so utterly unbearable as that of the strange hunter, whose name was not even known to them; notwithstanding the fact that they were fleeing from a supposed danger at his behest.

Recollecting this fact, the young man said:

"I suppose you will have no hesitation to tell us who and what you are, and the nature of the Indian troubles which threaten u's."

The stranger ran his single eye over the frame of the speaker, ejected a mouthful of tobacco juice, and then slowly responded:

"There ain't many in these yere parts, white or red, but what knows Sim Simpkins. But, seein' ye're all strangers, and don't even know enuff tew take keer of yerselves when the Injins is around, I s'pose 'tain't no matter o' wonder that ye don't know me. Sim Simpkins, as I said, is my name, and no name that I'm ashamed on. I've carried it for five-an'-forty years, and all that while it's sarved me a good turn. 'One Eye' the Injins call me, and that name answers the purpose jest as well as any other.

"I've traveled these yere forests ever sence I's a lad, and skessly a year o' all that time but what thar's been some kind o' trouble with the reds. So I can't be considered parfec'ly green in the matter o' Injin-craft. First I went intew it wi' my old dad and uncle. But one at a time they got knocked over brushin' it with the copper dogs, and left me purty much alone. Most likely I'll foller the same way they went, sooner or later, but it's one consulashin, I've sent more nor a hundred o' the critters off, one time or another. It counts up fast when ye knock over from one tew a half dozen every day for a month, and like 'nuff keep it up all summer about that way."

While speaking, the hunter had kept his eye in active use, making certain that no danger for which they were not prepared threatened the party. At this juncture he paused several moments, listening intently, and seeming to take in at one grand sweep the whole array of the forest forces about them. Apparently satisfied that all was right, he proceeded:

"I was goin' tew tell ye about this present Injin rampage. Ye see it's the Pawnees, cuss their infarnal nasty hides. Wal, it seems

they've some cause to feel bad, for a few raskilly scamps, what's the same color as you and me, cutside, went off intew their country, and killed some of their women an' children, jist out of pure divility. 'Tain't much wonder it made the Injins rave. Well, them scamps got clear, most on 'em, and the Injins they jest went in for a general scrimmage.

"Me and Billy Larkin had been out trappin' through the winter, and a poor fellow what had one of their stray balls in his body came along, and told us how the Pawnees h: d riz, and karkilated tew sweep all afore 'em. We helped the poor fellow up what we could, then sent him on his way. Arter he was gone we talked it over, Billy and me, and made up our minds that we couldn't stay there any longer; besides, it was gittin' late, and about time to move, anyway. We didn't feel like turnin' our backs on 'em afore we knew anything what was up, and so we talked it over, and Billy said he thought we'd better go out and meet 'em. I didn't say yis or no to it, 'cause I didn't much care. But long as Billy wanted tew go, I'se willin', so we pulled up stakes, buried our traps, and burned up our shauty.

"We started off, with everything we had in the world on our backs, savin' the traps we had buried, and some few skins, that warn't of no great account, anyway.

"This fellow what I'se speakin' on, he told us about where the Injins was when he got hit, and karkilated they didn't intend comin' much nearer, not that way, at least. So we went out within about five miles o' where we s'posed they was, and stopped for the night. Billy took the fu'st watch, so I laid down, and in about five jiffies was sound asleep,

"The fu'st thing I knew Billy was holdin' ontew my arm, and whisperin', 'I'm afeard the Injins are 'round, Sim; I wish you'd see.' As I said, he warn't the quickest feller in the world tew make out any thing, but once let him put a rifle-sight ontew a feller, and 'twas all day with him. So I begun tew listen, and I found out that he wasn't a bit out o' the way about the red-skins. They was all round the woods, and I made up my mind right off that they was makin' a night tramp on't. Sez I, Billy, we've got tew git off out o' this the best way we can. Right off this way, and creep for it, sez I.

"So we crept off the way it seemed most likely we shouldn't find any of the plaguey cusses. But they's all round us. We crept and crawled till it seemed we must have got well clear of 'em, but then ye might listen, and hear 'em all round. Finally, it seemed we had got clear and so we both listened to see if any o' the varmints was anywhere round. We couldn't hear nothin', and then we concluded tew walk. So we got ontew our feet, and begun to travel. But in less'n a minit Billy stepped on a stick. It cracked, and I hearn an Injin grunt; next minit off went a gun, and poor Billy sung out, 'I'm shot, Sim.'

"Well, blame me, fellers, if ever anything, from the day my old dad was killed, took me as that did. 'Where is it?' sez I; but afore he could tell me the Injins give a yell, and three or four on 'em come, lickety bang, right ontew

us. Billy had dropped tew the ground, but he made out tew get his rifle up, and one o' them raskils never knowed what hurt 'im. The rest warn't much better, for I went intew 'em rough and ready. Mebby some on 'em got away, but if they did I didn't see 'em. Every onz what I sot eyes on fell down and hurt his head, so't he never got over it.

"By'n-by I got through with 'em, and then I hurried back to find Billy, and see how bad he's hurt. I tried to git him up, but the poor fellow wouldn't hear any thing to that. 'It's no use, Sim,' he said; 'I'm done for; take care o' yerself, and leave me here; the Injins can't hurt me any more.' Course I wouldn't leave an old comrade that way, so I jest took him up in my arms, and made tracks as fast as I could with my load. I was in hopes I could git him off, and doctor him up, somewhere. But that's no sich thing. I didn't go more'n a quarter o' a mile afore I stopped and sot him down. 'Twas starlight, and I could see his face toler'bly, seein' the trees was open above us. I saw then that it warn't no use, for the poor feller was nigh about gone.

"He didn't breathe more nor a dozen breaths arter that, and when I's sartin he'd died, I pressed his eyelids together. Blame me, chaps, but 'twas a hard job that—" and the rough speaker dashed away a tear. "I carried him off as far as I could, easy, and then I scooped him out a shallow grave beside a rock, and put him in. The Injins didn't seem to track me right off, for I had plenty o' time to fix up round the body o' my poor friend. I waited till mornin', and then I crawled back where the Injins was. I seen a lot o' 'em sittin' round a fire, and I jist plumped two on 'em in a line. Both tumbled, and while the red-skins was makin' up their minds what had happened, I was jest shippin' back out o' the way.

"Wal, to make a long story short, I kept harpin' away like that all day yesterday, and to-day I've played 'em the same game. Good old Pinchers has helped me out of one or tew scrapes, and killed one red-skin on his own account. I was jest fallin' back tew wait for the Injins to-morrow mornin', when I happened tew see your fire. It's about the time o' night the Injins move, and I wouldn't be surprised if they's a-sneakin' along behind us at this very minit."

"You don't s'pose there's any danger o' their cuttin' off a feller?" demanded the startled Luman Leonard.

"Sart'in, I do," returned Simpkins, quite coolly, as it seemed to the listeners. "Ye never can tell what these cusses will dew. But, one thing's sart'in, Pinchers 'll bring us news if they git uncomfortably near."

Suddenly he paused, with a sharp "biss," which put his companions on the alert. Then he bent his ear to the ground for a moment, rising with an indescribable expression upon his face.

The mystery of his movements was soon solved, however. First a gentle movement, and then the quick patter of some four-footed animal, was followed by the appearance of a large, fierce-looking mastiff, which trotted up to Simpkins, and, after looking the hunter full in the

face, turned about and gazed in the direction whence he had come with a singular intelligence.

"What is it, Pinchers?" demanded his master, placing one hand upon the animal's head.

The brute uttered a low growl, snapping his teeth together with a force which sent an involuntary chill to the blood of Frank and Luman.

"Ye see what the animal says," remarked his master, turning toward his companions. "Now, maybe ye kin read in books, and understand somethin' from the black marks on the paper. I can't, 'cause I never had any sech chance. But when that dog acts like that, I kin read 'red-skins,' as plain as you can what's made with ink and stuff onto paper."

"Do ye think they're comin'?" asked Leonard, endeavoring to pierce the darkness from which the faithful animal had emerged.

"Think so? No; I know it! I tell you, I'd a great deal sooner depend on this dog than any livin' man I know. If poor Billy had minded the dog, he hed no need tew hev been killed as he was. It's jest as I told ye, the tarnal critters are goin' tew make a night move on't."

"Then what hed we better dew?" pursued Luman.

"Dew nothin' but hurry on yer wagins as fast as ye kin, and keep 'em out o' the way, where the Injins won't catch a sound from 'em. While you're dewin' that I'll fall back, with the pup, and see about mister Injin. If anything is up one of us'll let you know it."

CHAPTER III. THE FIRST SACRIFICE.

EVERY one in the group felt that not a moment was to be lost. Singular though it might be, the strange scout had taken a deep interest in the fortunes of the little emigrant party with whom he had come in contact, and resolved to save them from the infernal horrors which would be their certain lot at the hands of the savages, should the latter but once succeed in getting them into their power. That they would do this, if the most strenuous means were not used, Simpkins had no doubt.

Whispering a few words of instruction to his dog, which the animal seemed to comprehend, the daring man wheeled into the forest to meet and brave the coming savages, while Luman Leonard and his companions hurried on the wagon. This was an unusually difficult task from the nature of the ground over which they were moving. There was a mere trail, winding hither and thither in the forest, blind enough in the full light of day, next to impossible to follow in the darkness of a moonless night. To add to the disadvantages, when the trail was found it ran up hill and down, over creeks and stones, brushwood and ruts. To attempt fast driving over such uncertain ways would be about as certain destruction as falling into the hands of the Indians.

Still the party managed to keep up a very respectable pace. Mr. Leonard going in advance to select the way, while Frank, at his own request, followed in the rear to catch any tidings or sounds from Sim Simpkins.

The women, pale and distressed, conferred together in anxious tones, while the overgrown

boy who officiated as driver, handled his reins with trembling hands, fearing, yet almost hoping for an encounter with the Indians.

It was not half an hour before the quick tread of Simpkins was heard in the forest, and with a stealthy, gliding step he moved up to the rear of the little train.

"What is it?" demanded Frank, who was beside him in a moment.

"You'll hev tew onhitch the bosses, and leave this part o' the country mighty quick—wagins and all, or you'll be goners. The Injins hev got the scent, and are comin' like mad."

"But I can't leave the wagons," returned Leonard, who had heard the announcement; "all I hev in the world is in them."

"Don't make any odds," was the stern reply. "Be quick in what I tell you, or ye'll repent of it. Quick, you women; out and onter these hosses. You, boy, straddle one, and you, stranger, take the other. There, now, you are all right. Go ahead, and if we kin keep the redskins back, so'z to give ye a fair start, we'll dew it. Now go on."

While Sim had been keeping up this running conversation, the horses had been detached from the wagons, the women mounted upon two of them, Mr. Leonard and his son occupying the others. It seemed hard to them to leave the bulk of their earthly goods to the savages, but it was a consolation that they had a fair quantity of ammunition, all their ready money, and many little articles of comfort and use on their persons. But, however great the sacrifice might be, it was a pleasure to save the lives of so many, and their hesitation at the step was but momentary.

As they were about riding away, Frank sprung to the side of Cora's horse, and grasped her hand in his own for a moment.

"You must be very careful, dear," he whispered.

"I will," was the faltering response. "And you, Frank, have more need than myself to be careful, for you have no horse to depend upon."

"Never fear for me," was the encouraging reply. "This stranger is a host in himself. I am not afraid to trust to his guidance."

With a mutual pressure of the hand they separated. Cora rode on with the family, and Frank turned to the side of the hunter.

"The Injins ain't quite here yet," remarked the latter. "I left Pinchers tew look out for 'em; but they'll be here soon; while we're waitin' for 'em, let's run these tew wagons up alongside, and set 'em afire!"

"Do you think we'll have to do that?" asked Frank.

"No, we sha'n't hev to dew anything of the kind. We can leave 'em for the Injins, and let them pull 'em over, but that ain't what I want. I've got a use for 'em. You jest step back behind that big tree yonder, and I'll show ye what 'tis."

The young man obeyed the behest, and when the one-eyed hunter had placed the heavy wagons alongside each other, which he seemed to do with comparative ease, he busied himself by applying fire to the contents of one. Fanning the sparks thus obtained into a gentle breeze, he applied it to the other, and was gratified to observe both vehicles spring into a light flame.

Gliding away he rejoined his companion, and regarded the progress of his work with satisfaction.

"Keep yer eye out for any o' the torments," he said, "while I look back here a few rods for just such a place as I want. I'll show ye some fun, pretty soon."

He crept away into the darkness, leaving Frank utterly mystified as to his intentions. Presently he pulled the young man by the sleeve, almost before the latter was aware of his presence.

"Come," he whispered, "I've found jest the place, whar we kin pick out the reds at our leisure. Here, now," and he pointed to a large fallen log, partially decayed and bedded into the ground, "plank yourself on the t'other side of that, and keep watch till some Injins make their appearance. You'll see 'em soon, now."

Even as he ceased speaking there was a slight commotion in the forest beside them, and Pinchers made his appearance, exhibiting the same signs as upon the former occasion.

"Thar they come," remarked Simpkins, placing himself behind the log, beside his companion. "Here, Pinchers, lay down here, and rest yourself. Now, keep an eye out. The Injins'll naterally gather round that fire. When they dew, p'int your rifle intew the thickest clump ye can see, and let 'em hev it. I'll follow ye up. That'll naterally put the Injins tew their trumps a bit. Then we'll be governed by what seems best. 'Sh; there they come!"

At that moment the dusky features of an Indian appeared beyond the blazing wagons, quickly followed by others to the number of twenty or more. As Sim had predicted, they gathered about the fire, which was rather agreeable, as the evening was quite cool. They were fierce, dreadful-looking foes to one who had never seen them before, arrayed as they were in all the horrors of war-paint.

Almost reluctantly the young man brought his rifle to bear upon them over the log, for it seemed suicidal to him to fire upon such a gathering of savages. But the old scout was calm, though his single eye glowed with a strange light.

"Let 'em have it," he whispered, as the group seemed upon the point of coming on toward them.

With a dreadful shudder at heart the young man brought down his rifle-sight, full among the dusky throng, and when it covered the left breast of a tall savage he pulled the trigger.

In quick succession came a flash, a report, the falling of the savage, and a yell of maddened surprise from the Indian's companions. Grasping their weapons, they turned in the direction whence the single shot had come, and seemed prepared to wreak vengeance upon the unseen marksman.

But Sim Simpkins, cool and collected, had risen to one knee, with his rifle resting across it. He waited until the exact moment, and then threw out his heavy barrel.

"This goes for poor Billy Larkin," he said, and fired.

It did not seem to Frank that he had even glanced through the sights, but one Indian fell dead, and another staggered from the ball,

which he received in the shoulder. The effects of the shot were electrical. Almost before the report of the shot had died away, not an Indian remained within the radiance of the burning wagons, save the two whose war-path had ended so suddenly. The balance of the party had sought the nearest cover, and begun to fire their guns and arrows idly in the direction where the fatal messengers had sped. But their shots were foolishly in vain.

Pausing long enough to witness the result of his shot, Sim grasped Frank by the hand, and led him quickly from the spot.

"Load yer rifle as ye go," he said, when they had gained a safe distance. "Hear the blind fools rattling away," he added, as shot after shot was fired. "They'd better save their powder and ball, and hurry along, if they're goin' to walk with us."

They reloaded their guns as they ran, and when that delicate operation had been performed, Simpkins paused. For a few moments he listened intently.

"Hark!" he said, at length. "Don't you hear them pattin' round out there?"

"I think so," the young man replied, in a moment.

"That's what you hear," continued the veteran Indian-fighter. "They're sart'in we're round there, somewhere, and they mean to nose us out. Let 'em work. We can slip back about ten rods, and give 'em another salute. It'll work different from the fu'st. They'll make a rush till they git beyond the spot whar the smoke riz. But when they don't find anything they'll naterally stop to hunt, and poke all about to see what's become of us."

The two men began to work their way back, and when they had reached a point which seemed to strike the old scout's fancy, they stopped.

"Now ye want tew aim right whar ye hear their steps," he said. "Then, as soon's ye've fired, take yer back track, and cut for good. Pinchers 'll watch the red-skins, and bring us word when they're up to any mischief."

The last remark was addressed to the dog, who wagged his tail in reply, and crept away into a thicket near by with the most silent movements.

"Now then, shewt right off through here," said Simpkins, indicating the proper direction to his companion. "Hold yer fire till I say ready, and then blaze away. Now, ready—FIRE!"

The two sharp cracks which followed could scarcely have been distinguished from a single heavy report. A yell of pain and rage came from the Indians in the distance, but without stopping for any further revelations, the two dashed away with all the speed which was allowable under the circumstances. Rough as was the way they made good progress, and flattered themselves at the prospect of leaving the savages far behind.

"Give me yer rifle," said Simpkins, when he had finished reloading his own, which operation he seemed to perform almost as readily upon a keen run as standing still. "I want a ball too; mine's too big."

He received the desired articles, and soon had

the rifles both in a condition for immediate use. Then he paused, and after listening a few moments, during which all appeared silent, he said:

"I reckin the red-skins air huntin' fer us yit. Wal, let 'em work at it. While they're dewin' that we'll be gittin' out o' their way."

"You don't think there will be any danger but that the family will get back to the settlement in safety now, I suppose," said Frank, his voice visibly affected.

"I ain't a proffit, nor the sun of a proffit, nor the seventeenth darter o' a proffit, and so I can't tell," replied Simpkins. "But one thing I kin say, purty sart'in: if we stave 'em off for an hour or two longer, I shall feel great hopes of gittin' ye all out safe. There's hosts o' the Injins, and not but a few of us. But Pawnees ain't over 'n above brave, and if once their spunk begins tew fail, it's clean gone, I'll dew my best to git ye threw. I'd dew it if 'twas only fer yer own sake, young man. I must say I've tu'k a likin' tew ye, and I'll make my best tally for your side."

The look of satisfaction and gratitude which Frank cast upon his companion were not observed; for at that moment, an appalling cry and shrieks burst upon their ears.

CHAPTER IV.

CUT OFF.

"WHAT can that mean?" demanded Frank, catching his companion by the arm.

"There ain't but one thing it kin mean," was the quick reply. "The cut-throats hev got our friends intew trouble, and if we're goin' ter help 'em any, we'll hev' to be on hand for it."

"Then don't let us lose a minute, for heaven's sake!" was the almost frantic response. "Oh, God! If we should be too late!"

From the forest in advance of them, had come shouts, and shots, and cries. Well they knew that their friends had encountered some portion of the terrible Pawnee band, and to Frank, especially, the thought that they might be defeated, perhaps massacred at once, was dreadful.

Holding their rifles ready for instant use, the twain set forward at a round pace, Frank, keeping his place beside the taller scout, who strode on as though darkness and unevenness of ground were no impediment to him.

Suddenly both paused, for, right in advance of them, the hasty tramping of horses could be heard.

"There they come back again," said Frank, almost joyfully.

"Don't be tew sure; it may be the Injins," returned his companion. "Step behind this tree, and cock your rifle."

"No, it's them," said the young man, a moment later. "Don't you see the flutter of the women's dresses!"

"I guess you're right, my boy, arter all. Speak tew 'em, and let's see."

"Leonard! Leonard! Cora! Is that you?" the youth cried, placing himself in the path before them.

The panic-stricken party brought up their scarcely less frightened steeds with some diffi-

culty, and when he had succeeded in bringing his party to a pause, Luman Leonard replied:

"Yis, it's us; is it you, Frank?"

"Certainly. What is the matter?"

"We run right intew a nest of the critters, out yonder, and like to hev all got killed," was the hurried answer. "I fear they've done for Alvin, poor boy!"

"Not killed?" demanded Frank, with a dreadful pang at his heart.

"He was struck, and tumbled off his nag, and the rest of us had an all-fired narrer escape," pursued the excited father. "The Injins are arter us, lickety-split. What'll we dew, Mister What's-yer-name?"

"Ye've got intew a clus' scrape," said Simpkins. "My way would be tew git off'n them hosses and cut their throats; ye can't dew any more with 'em."

"But the wimmin-folks?" questioned Luman.

"If they can't go afoot, ye'll hev tew keep the hosses," was the decided answer.

"We can," said Mrs. Leonard. "I am quite willing to make the attempt, if it'll be of any use."

"And so am I," added Cora. "It's a pity if we cannot walk a little distance, when these brave men are daring everything for our sakes."

"Spoken like a sensible little gal," said Simpkins. "Off you come."

And grasping her in his brawny arms, he slung her to the ground as though she had been a sack of feathers. In a moment his keen knife passed through the horse's neck, and the others quickly received like wounds.

"Now we go this way, quick!" he exclaimed, leading them off at right-angles with their former course.

"Dad, is that you?" called a voice, as they had hardly quitted the forest trail.

"It's Alvin!" exclaimed the overjoyed parent. "He ain't dead, arter all. Here we be, my boy!"

"Hush-sh!" warned the scout, grasping the inconsiderate speaker by the arm. "Don't ye know ye'r' right among red-skins, and if ye don't keep parfictly quiet, and not make any noise louder'n yer nateral breathin', they'll hev ye arter all? Now, mind that, all on ye, and I'll bring along the boy."

While they were pushing forward at their best speed, he turned back, and grasped the boy's hand, leading him along with an exclamation of caution. It seemed in the encounter which his party had with the savages, Alvin's horse had received a fatal shot after the others had turned about to seek the only man who could guide their destinies in such a frightful emergency. Horse and rider came to the ground in a confused piles, and as no one could stop to ascertain the extent of the damage, it was natural to suppose the worst. But the lad was uninjured, and as soon as he could extricate himself, and pick up his favorite "Bunker Hill," he started on in pursuit of his friends.

It was apparent that he had been fortunate in making such good progress, for he had scarcely left the traveled path, when the light steps of pursuing Indians tould be heard in the direction whence he came.

"Hurry along," said Simpkins, giving him a gentle push. "But don't make a bit o' noise. I'll stop a minit and watch these fellers, so's to see what they're up tew."

The lad obeyed, and though the sounds of his progress fell with fearful distinctness, the Pawnees were so occupied in matters of their own, as not to regard the unequivocal sounds.

As they reached the place where the bleeding horses were standing and lying, the band drew together, and held a rapid consultation in their own tongue. It was evident enough to them why the horses had been thus abandoned, and they felt certain the fugitives had escaped their brethren in the rear, and were still in the forest. But what direction they had taken upon leaving the spot where the Pawnees were now congregated, they could not determine. It was too dark to discover any trail so faint as that left by a party on foot, even with Indian sagacity to assist them. They bent to listen; but it was now too late for that. Had they resorted to it earlier, it was more than probable the unpracticed steps of Alvin would have betrayed not only himself, but the whole party.

The long acquaintance of Simpkins with the Pawnees, and his partial knowledge of their language, with such gestures as the starlight enabled him to observe, satisfied him of the import of their council. It seemed an admitted fact that fugitives had struck off at nearly right angles to the course they had been pursuing. The only question seemed to be, in what direction they had gone?

One party, and it seemed the minority, urged that they had taken to the mountains; while others argued, with apparently more probability, that they had gone to the left, and would make an effort to get by them, and back to the settlement.

Opinions were divided, and finally each party was allowed to take the course which seemed to them most likely to bring them up with their contemplated victims. Three, only, turned their faces mountainward, while the balance spread through the forest in an opposite direction.

The one-eyed scout waited till satisfied that this was a permanent disposition of the savage pursuers, and then he stole along like a dark spirit behind the trio who really were on the trail of his new-made friends. It would not have been likely to have added to the peace of mind of those Pawnees had they known what a foe was on their trail.

Ere a half-hour had passed, they caught the sounds of Alvin's steps. The boy had not quite overtaken his party, and, as he tramped on through the forest, his heavy boots gave back a crashing response at every step. The Indians uttered satisfied grunts as they heard these confirmations of their theory. They paused, and seemed upon the point of calling to their mistaken brethren; but selfish counsels finally prevailed, and they hurried forward, with long, loping, noiseless steps.

But rapid as their movements might be they were followed by one quite as stealthy as themselves, and whose purpose was quite as deadly. Beside the white walked a four-footed assistant whom the Indians already had learned to fear,

and whose presence, had it been known, might have caused a change in their plans. Pinchers, having watched the savages till their hostile intention became evident to his brute sagacity, had sought the side of his master, and now trotted along without noise, ready for any further service which might be required of him.

Of course the braves were not long in overtaking the boy, and with him the entire family, whose movements could be heard quite distinctly. Unprotected as the fleeing ones were, none of them had a suspicion that their foes could steal upon them so silently.

The nearest Pawnee was within a few yards of Alvin, and had raised his hatchet, ready to bound forward upon the boy, when Simpkins gently patted the head of faithful Pinchers, and pointed toward the red-skin. A spring followed, a rush over the ground, and the would-be murderer was borne to the ground by a force he could not comprehend. Vainly he struggled, while the hot blood gushed from his torn and bleeding throat. The strong mastiff shook him wildly hither and thither, his terrible teeth opening fresh arteries at every grasp.

The other savages would have fled to the assistance of their comrade, but at once found plenty of work to occupy their energies. One of their number fell at a single blow from the scout's knife, and the survivor, seeing the fate which had befallen his companions, turned to flee. But, vain was the effort. At a single word from his master, the terrible Pinchers bounded over the ground and dragged down the fleeing Pawnee. The blow he attempted to aim was not given, the lightning movements of the dog preventing, and the clutch of his sharp teeth upon the red-skin's throat checked the yell with which he sought to warn his brethren of their untimely fate. There was a sharp struggle for a moment, and then the Indian gasped forth his life, while the sagacious beast sought his master again.

Alvin, startled by the light commotion in his rear, had turned to discover the cause. He was a little nonplused when he beheld, faintly, the bloody work which was going on, and stood spell-bound till it was finished.

"Ye ain't much hurt, be ye?" Sim Simpkins demanded, in his usual quiet manner.

"Not a single speck," returned the boy. "I didn't know anything was up till I hear the rumpus goin' on."

"No, nor ye wouldn't if it hadn't been for Pinchers. In jest half a minit this here Injin would have had yer skulp hung tew his belt, and them other fellers 'd a' been skinnin' the heads o' the rest o' yer folks."

The lad rubbed his head vigorously, to make sure that no such unhappy fate had befallen it, and then they hastened on to join the balance of the party.

"We thought we hear suthin' of a scuffle," said Luman, when the scout joined them in his usual silent manner. "I s'pose it warn't nothin' of no 'count."

"No; only three red-skins foller'd ye up, and pup here and I sent 'em to pay off for poor Billy Larkin!"

"Ye don't mean that!" exclaimed the father,

glancing about him as though to make certain of his own safety. "It can't be that ye killed off three Injins as easy as that!"

"Hain't, eh? S'posin' you go back there and look, or jest take a squint at that dog's jaws. Mebby that'll set yer doubts tew rest."

"By gosh, stranger," was the earnest response. "I reckon it's mighty lucky for us that we built up such a 'tarnal big fire, for we'd all ha' been killed if it hadn't been for you; wouldn't we, now?"

A smile lighted up the single eye of the stern hunter, as he lightly responded:

"That ain't sart'in. Ye'd 'a' stood about the same chance of gittin' away that a mouse would of gnawin' through an oak while a cat was gittin' ready tew jump on him; or maybe as good a sight as a man would to make his will arter a grizzly hed got his paws ontew him."

"I hope you'll help us till we get to safety again," said the elder of the females, in a voice tremulous with emotion. "I am sure we should be lost without you."

"He has been so good to us thus far, that I feel certain he will help us to the end," added Cora.

"I sha'n't leave ye," was the assurance from the lips of the scout. "But, it won't dew to waste time. We must git tew the mountains before daylight if it kin be done."

As the party set forward, led on by the hunter himself, while Pinchers protected the rear, there was one man in the party who felt differently toward the tall stranger than he had done five minutes previous.

CHAPTER V. MOUNTAINWARD.

SLOWLY—it seemed to them very slowly—and steadily the little party crawled on, Sim Simpkins leading the way. Although he selected the easiest route compatible with direct progress, the way was very rough; especially so to our emigrants, who were quite unaccustomed to picking their path through forests in the darkness. So far as silent progress was concerned, it was out of the question. Unpracticed feet, armed with heavy boots, made especially for hard service in a land where cobblers were far from plenty, could not tramp, slip, stumble and plunge along without making a noise which could be heard far and wide through the forest.

To the practiced scout, whose delicacy of tread could hardly have been equaled by a cat, these sounds came with startling force. It was in vain that he whispered injunctions to the party to step more lightly. He soon satisfied himself that this would be an impossibility, and devoted all his efforts to reaching the mountains with his charge, praying that no quick-eared savage might pass within hearing-distance of them.

For two long hours they held on their course, and then the swells of land seemed to take another form. Instead of a rise and fall, like waves of the sea, they rose very steadily, and fell but slightly. Although they could not distinguish outlines and distances in the darkness, it became evident to the party from the conformation of the land, that they had reached the mountains.

After proceeding a little distance further they

came to a halt and gathered about their strange guide, who had also paused.

"I s'pose we'll hev tew hold a council, now, suthin' arter the manner of the Injins. I rayther think we've got out o' hearin' and smellin' o' the critters, and what we want tew decide on is which way tew go."

"What way kin we go?" asked Leonard.

"We kin dew one o' three things," was the reply. "We kin keep on this side of the mountains, and skirt along back suthin' near the way ye cum'. Or we kin cross the mountains, and go over to the settlements on th' other side."

"Which will be the easiest?" asked Frank.

"You mean the easiest and the safest, I suppose?" queried the dark hunter.

"Of course," was the answer.

"It's most likely the Injins'll keep up their kerryin's on on, this side of the mountains, and 'tain't 'tall likely they'll cross over. There's no knowin' how fur they may go afore any of our folks can come and stop 'em. We may git tew a place o' safety by comin' back this way, and we may not. Over t'other side about forty miles away, we'll find human bein's settled, and thar I've no doubt it'll be safer for us in the long run. It'll be a leetle harder gettin' thar, 'cause we'll find some purty rough travelin' over the mountains, especially for the wimmin-folks."

"Never fear for us," was the hearty response of Cora. "We are brave and strong, as you shall see."

"I've no manner o' doubt o' that. But it ain't for me tew say which way ye shall go. Jest settle that among yerselves, and I'll dew my best tew git ye away from the red-skins."

"It don't make much odds to us which way we go," returned Luman. "Wherever we stop we've got tew go to work for suthin' tew eat and wear, for we hain't anything now. You'd better go ahead the way ye think best, and we'll follow ye. You know better'n we."

"I've told ye what I think," the hunter replied, "and now I want ye to say what shall be done; and say quick, for we hain't a minit to lose."

"I think we'd better go back this way, and give warning and help to those who are most exposed to an attack from the Indians," said Frank. "We may be able to collect a body strong enough to oppose them—to check them, in fact."

"We ain't the right sort of a gang to dew that," replied the hunter. "Ye see the Injins hed got beyond ye when ye undertook tew cut off on a straight line. What sort of a chance would ye hev in a straight race o' twenty miles, on foot, with these wimmin-folks along?"

"I think I should be inclined to try it," was the confident rejoinder.

"Jest as ye say. Go which way ye think best, and I'll dew my best for ye. Only make up yer minds quick."

The party conferred together for a short time, and then they turned again to Simpkins.

"We've concluded we'll try her on this side o' the hills," said Mr. Leonard. "Mebby we'll miss it, but it seems tew bad to let the Injins right ontew them poor folks what don't know any thing about it."

"All right, then."

Thus saying, the tall hunter glided on in advance of the party, and shaped a new course, leading alongside the mountain range. But his very manner, although he spoke no word, showed that he was mistrustful of danger. Keeping his eyes and ears open he urged on their way, climbing over such hills as would require too great a deviation, and selecting the most open paths through the extensive thickets which lined the sides of the mountains. There were rocks, chasms and ravines in their path, but he guided them all in the ready manner which only long experience can give, and conducted the party steadily onward.

Presently an almost imperceptible rustling was heard, and the moment after a dark form glided past those in the rear, and sought the side of Simpkins. All recognized it at once as the sagacious Pinchers, and a general feeling of alarm prevailed at his appearance.

"D'y'e think the Injins are arter us?" demanded Luman, with a hesitating voice.

"We'll see what the dorg says," returned the veteran scout. "Purp, is the Injins arter us?"

The beast cast a quick glance around, but made no indication to the rear. Finally he pointed his muzzle to the front, and after taking a long sniff, uttered a low whine.

"Is it red-skins?" his master demanded.

A growl seemed to answer, as plainly as brute signs could, in the affirmative. But there was no change upon the features of Simpkins.

"Ye see, this dorg says thar's Injins ahead of us," he said. "I suppose ye don't think the brute'd lie; if ye knew him as well as I dew ye'd know he wouldn't. I suppose ye don't any of ye want to run ontew Injins the first dive, for they might not be civil tew a feller. So, if ye'll stay here a bit I'll go on ahead and see what's took the dorg so."

No one offered any objections, and in company with his faithful mastiff, the scout set off. He was certain that foes were in advance, and was fearful that the party would be cut off if they attempted to proceed further in this direction. His own sense of safety had pointed to an immediate crossing of the mountains, which course he believed would have insured the safety of the party. But as such a course would have been more fatiguing, he was content that they choose their own route.

Now, however, it was his intention, should the savages be found in force ahead of them, to take the party by the most direct route away from the surrounding danger.

Following the lead of Pinchers, to whose sagacity the hunter trusted quite as much as to his own skill, he traveled for some time. Indeed, he was beginning to fancy that the danger, if any there was, was so far away as to be of very little account. But, while that thought was running through his head, the dog, which was slightly in advance, drew back, and looking up into his master's face uttered a low whine, as though of caution.

Stopping in his tracks, Simpkins bent his ear to the ground, and a moment's listening convinced him that he was much nearer the Indians than he had anticipated. He could

hear the cautious movements of some being, which long experience in such matters assured him was none other than a savage. He soon gathered that the steps were approaching the place where he crouched, and that the one whose movements he had first heard was not alone.

His first impulse was to pause and note the direction they took, and endeavor to learn their motive; but second thought, the recollection of the almost helpless party who might be exposed to unknown danger by his protracted absence, caused him to forego that intention, and hasten back to his charge.

Turning, he crawled away very stealthily, and when a sufficient distance had been gained to render his movements safe, he started back at as rapid a pace as was consistent with ordinary caution. Pinchers trotted along beside him, and his strange actions served to excite the hunter to greater speed.

"What's up is more'n I kin tell," he mused, feeling the interior of his rifle-pan, to make sure that the priming was in order. "If we hadn't just come from thar' I'd swear the dorg smelt Injins that way. I dew believe he does, though why de didn't scent 'em afore I can't say. Gosh, all fire-locks! If they should spoilo my work, arter all."

He gave less heed now to cautiousness, and trotted forward, regardless of the rotten twigs which cracked beneath his tread.

Suddenly a yell rung over the still forest. Too often had Sim heard that dreadful cry to doubt its meaning. Even at that distance the wild whoop of the Pawnees was appalling, long as he had been accustomed to it. What, then, must it be to those who had never heard it before that night?

The first fierce yell was followed by shots and shouts which the stern hunter knew were not all Indian, and the thought that his fellow-men were making a brave defense, served to dispel half his anxiety. Still he flew rather than ran through the forest, and in a very short time had reached the vicinity, though fully half a mile away at the commencement of the conflict,

Yet, as short as had been the time, all sounds had ceased, and it was evident that one party or the other remained masters of the field. Which it might be, he could not tell. There were no sounds of any struggling, no fugitives flying from the scene. A cold chill began to settle upon the hunter's heart.

"I see how it is," he thought. "The Injins beat, as o' course they would, and now they're takin' the hair o' their victims! It's too bad; but maybe they ain't all flaxed out, and I may dew su'thin' yet!"

He crept up toward the spot, dreading the revelation which could not be avoided. He was quite near the place when a confused moving seemed taking place, and in a few moments three or four forms appeared, pushing through the shrubbery. They were not Indians, he was soon convinced, and the joyful fact that they were his friends and allies soon became apparent.

Rising up carefully, and speaking as he did so, in order that some excited one might not send a shot toward him in the darkness, he confronted the party.

"What's the news?" he asked. "What was the firin'?"

"A cussed lot of Injins," returned Leonard, who was in advance. "We give 'em a drubbin' out, though. But, blast 'em, they've took off Cora, and hit Frank a knock over the head."

"I ain't hurt a bit," said Frank, who was quite wild from the force of the blow he had received. "But I tell you, I must have that girl back—I'm going after her alone, if none of you will go with me."

"Wait, and be cool, youngster," returned the old scout, with the same calmness which ever characterized him. "We must git away from here, or the place will be swarming with Injins, in a minute. Come, right up the side of the mountain is the best way tew purseed."

"But my daughter!" exclaimed Mrs. Leonard. "What will become of her?"

"Trust her to God, for a short time," was the reply, which had a strange sound as it fell from those lips. "We must look out for ourselves, and when that is done we'll give our attention to the gal."

"I'm afraid I never shall see my child again!" was the desponding rejoinder.

"You mustn't be afeard of any sech thing," was the response of the scout. "You mustn't think of that at all! Wait till we find a place where the red-skins can't git at the rest of ye so easy, and then, if it's a possible thing for mortal man tew git yer darter away from the red-skins she shall come."

"Then do let us hasten!" pleaded the agonized mother.

As they climbed the sloping side of the mountain, the hunter gathered from the sorrowing father the particulars of the daughter's capture.

It seemed that the party waited in silence for the return of their absent guide, keeping their rifles in hand, since they were fully cognizant of the danger which might threaten them at any moment. Hearing movements in the forest near by, they naturally supposed Sim to have returned, and fancied that he might be unable to discover their exact whereabouts in the darkness. The slight signal which they ventured to give caused a cessation of the sounds, and too late they began to realize that instead of signaling their absent guide, they had drawn the attention of a passing band of Pawnees.

Holding their rifles ready, the party waited the onset they expected. They were not disappointed. With a rush and a yell something more than half a dozen of the painted red-skins had rushed in, but two of them met their fate from a rapid volley which the whites gave when the forms of their foes became visible. The salute from the rifles being followed up by a discharge of pistols, and the three whites maintaining a bold front, their numbers seemed magnified to the Pawnees, who fled, leaving their dead behind.

On looking about to congratulate themselves, they found that Frank had been partially stunned by a blow from some blunt weapon, and, saddest chance of all! that the gentle Cora had utterly disappeared. To their unpracticed senses it was evident that she had been carried off bodily by the savages, and not knowing in

what manner to proceed, they set out, hoping to meet Simpkins.

In this we have seen them gratified.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MISSION.

THE party pushed up the side of the mountain, which was not very abrupt, and as they proceeded, the evidences of finding such a stronghold as Simpkins sought became every moment more apparent. Large masses of rock appeared upon all sides, and the way was obstructed by fallen trees and ravines.

Pausing at length, the guide sought out a place where he fancied no roving band of savages would penetrate, and which it seemed probable that one or two determined men could hold against quite a body of foes.

"There," he said, leading them to the place and stationing the party; "I want you, old man and boy, tew stay here and take keer o' yourselves, while me and this other feller goes off tew bring back the gal. Keep yer eye out fer red-skins, and don't waste a karnil of powder, acause it's precious stuff. You're tew keep out o' sight, and if ye see any Injins let 'em go by, if they'll dew it."

"I fancy us two don't stand much of a chance for getting her away, if we find where she is," said Frank, rather impatiently.

"Can't tell nothin' about that," returned Sim. "Here's Pinchers—he's more nor two purty good men, and we may dew the thing right up. But it's quite as likely no human bein' kin help the poor gal."

"I'm afraid we've waited too long," said Frank, as they began to descend the mountain-side.

"We couldn't dew anything till mornin', so's tew git a little light. But it's comin' now, and we won't lose any more time."

They repaired at once to the scene of conflict, and were not surprised to find the bodies of the fallen Indians removed.

"They come back with more force tew give ye a lickin'," said Simpkins. "But as ye wa'n't here, they concluded 'twar best tew pick up them what he'l got knocked over, an' make their way off. Here, Pinchers!"

"The dog readily responded, and his master continued:

"Here, pup, we want tew find these red-skins. Now be sure you don't lose 'em."

The intelligent animal snuffed around for a moment, and then set off at full speed. He slackened his pace on finding that his master and companion wished to follow, and, together, the three journeyed through the woods, Pinchers smelling out the trail, and the men following at their leisure.

"I tell yew it saves a deal o' searchin' and peekin' round tew hev sech a pup as that," remarked Simpkins with commendable pride. "I tell ye I wouldn't take that feller's weight in gold for him—that's what I wouldn't. 'Twould be a mighty poor speculation. It's very sart'in I never'd 'a' tramped these woods so long as I have if it hadn't been for that same pup. But, we'll hev' tew be keerful now; I karkelate we're a-gittin' purty near the Injins. I'll tell ye a little suthin' about that pup some day, if ye want tew hear it."

Frank signified his pleasure to listen at any convenient time, and then the conversation was dropped. During the few minutes which had elapsed since they had left the place of the fight, they had been tending almost due west. The direction had been such as to take them upon quite level ground, where the savages would be comparatively uncovered, and could be espied at considerable distance. But, this fact had about equal drawbacks, since they could not approach a body of savages in security, if they were once discovered after daybreak.

Soon Sim paused, and patted his rifle, as he pointed in advance of them.

"D'yee see the critter?" he demanded. "We're goin' tew find some of 'em purty soon; no knowin' whether it's the ones we want or not."

Frank strained his eyes through the gloom of dawn, but could distinguish nothing with certainty. He replied briefly that he could see nothing answering in appearance to an Indian.

"Ye won't see him any more," returned the scout. "He's gone behind some bushes. If I ain't mistaken his sellers are over there somewhere. We'll look and see what's to be found. Tread as light as you kin."

Frank followed in the footsteps of his leader, and thus the twain approached the place indicated. It was a rank growth of bushes, as they found upon gaining it, which extended some distance along the forest, crossing the course they had been pursuing, at right angles. Pinchers, too, had fallen back beside his master, as if to indicate that his part was performed in regard to the trail.

It was something of a task to penetrate the hedge-like bushes, and before the old hunter had reached the opposite side he paused, and, holding the bushes slightly apart with his left hand beckoned to his companion with a gesture of caution. The other pushed carefully forward and peered through the opening thus made. The sight which met his eyes, though far from being of a pleasant nature, was still gratifying, to a certain degree, and in a peculiar manner.

Seated around a small fire, and evidently engaged in a council, were about twenty Indians, all men of mark, fearfully painted and plumed. They were gravely discussing some question, in which they seemed much interested, and in regard to which there seemed a diversity of opinion. Straying about at short distances, listening to the counsels of their superiors, and guarding a solitary prisoner, the gentle Cora Leonard, were four or five more, evidently debarred by youth and inexperience from taking part in the council. The maiden seemed sad and weary; whether the expression upon her face indicated hopelessness or despair, they could not determine.

Frank gazed at the spectacle a full minute, drawing his breath through closely-shut teeth, and grasping his rifle with firm hands. Then he turned to Simpkins, and asked:

"What are you going to do?"

"Can you find yer way back to where yer folks was left?" the hunter demanded.

"I am very sure I can."

"Then go ahead, and tell her father and brother what's a-goin' on. They're holdin' a council over her, and my idee is that they'll try

to kill her some way. If there ain't any Injins hangin' round there; have her ma'r hid away som'er's thar, and the rest of ye burry back here as fast as ye can come. I guess ye'll bev time enuf, and if ye don't, pup and I'll try and take keer of 'em till ye come. Now don't lose any time, nor the way, either."

Frank promised to be as expeditious as possible, and had no doubt of being successful. He realized very well that two to twenty-five was rather too great odds for even the valor of Sim Simpkins. He took the general direction, and then crawled forth, making his way with all possible caution until out of reach of the savages. Then he started forth at a rapid pace and was very soon lost to the sight of his companion in the bushes.

Sim Simpkins was left alone almost in the midst of his foes. Calling his dog beside him by a gesture, and closing the bushes all about them, he waited with patience the return of his messenger, watching closely the proceedings of the Indians, meantime.

With them the council was now taking the form of a dispute rather than that legitimately belonging to it, and high words passed with plentiful flow from one to the other. The unseen listener endeavored to gather enough of the dispute to judge of its nature, but in this he was unsuccessful, all being in the Indian tongue, with so many Pawneeisms that he found it impossible to make out the precise subject. It might or might not relate to the maiden; he thought the latter.

At length one, more furious than his fellows, rose to his feet, and, brandishing his hatchet, wrathfully, in front of another brave, the challenge, if such it was, was promptly accepted, and the two prepared for a decisive contest. Several preparatory blows were given and parried, before the others could collect themselves to stop the conflict.

Each and every one of the warriors hurried to his feet, and sprung this way and that in the futile endeavor to separate the two determined antagonists. This was not done till a third, a tall, powerful fellow, stepped between, and holding the combatants apart with main force, addressed them in no measured terms, if gestures and gutturals be indicative of forcible language.

Those measures not proving effective, assistance was called and the belligerents deprived of their weapons, after which they were allowed to go at large, which they did with a rather chopfallen air. The council was then resumed, but not with the candid earnestness which usually distinguished such gatherings upon the part of the Indians. It soon terminated in an angry bolt, and as is usually the case, the fiercest party bore sway.

It was now quite dark, and Simpkins, from his uncomfortable covert, began to look for the return of his expected allies. He hoped they would come, and that very soon; for, in the present excited state of the Indians, it was uncertain what their next move would be.

It soon became evident what the intentions of the Pawnees were. A stout sapling near by was fixed upon as a stake, and to that the prisoner was bound. Then a short pause was

made, after which a portion of the gang scattered themselves about to gather brushwood and fagots.

The younger party, mere boys, who had never seen a war-path before, amused themselves by tormenting the helpless victim, in all imaginable ways. Arrows were drawn to the head and aimed full at her, after which the bow was gradually relaxed. Hatchets were hurled, striking the sapling above her head: or, perchance, only the motions would be made, the would-be warriors heartily enjoying any shrinking upon the part of the maiden.

Frequently the stern hunter was tempted to risk all on a sudden dash, with only his sagacious canine friend to back him against more than a score of enemies, and as often he restrained himself, casting back anxious glances in the direction whence his expected help was to come.

"The brutes!" he mused, grinding his teeth together hard, "I'll pay 'em for all this usin' a poor gal, and 'speshily one as good's this yere. Curse 'em, I say! How I wish't them folks would make their appearance!"

But they did not come. One long minute after another rolled away, minutes freighted with importance, and no signs of the required assistance. If it came not soon it would be too late! The warriors had collected a large pile of brushwood, and only hesitated to apply the brand that they might enjoy the too obvious sufferings of their prisoner.

The circle was formed, and the horrid orgies commenced. Still, for a time, the fatal brand was not applied. It was satisfaction enough for the brutal natures of the Pawnees to witness the sufferings of their victim in anticipation of the dreadful fate which seemed in store for her. Once or twice she cast her eyes around, as though in hope that friends might be near to attempt her rescue. But she saw no one, and as reason told her how vain was any such hope, she bowed her head and groaned in bitterness of heart.

Finally the critical moment seemed at hand. A savage raised a blazing brand from the remains of their late council-fire, and plunged it into the brushwood. The movement destroyed the flame, but a little blowing and coaxing soon revived it, and a warm glow spread upward and around.

At the same moment, when Simpkins was nervously awaiting the terrible odds against him, he descried a moving form away through the forest; then another, and yet another! Joy! The promised needed assistance was now at hand! It would still be in time, as they were coming rapidly.

The only thing to be feared was that the Indians would discover the new-comers, and that was the very thing which did happen. A watchful brave, whose attention was not directed entirely to the fiery spectacle before them, saw the advancing forms, and quickly communicated the news to his brethren. A rush was at once made to meet them, the Indians penetrating the bushy thicket, and crouching close, in order to prepare an ambush for their approaching foes.

One of the number was so unfortunate as to enter the bushes, exactly where Sim and his dog

were crouching. But he made no alarm. In an instant the sharp teeth of Pinchers were fastened in his neck, and he sunk to the ground, to struggle for a moment and then die. The others gained the cover in safety, and in a few moments not a savage was to be seen.

As he rapidly considered the position in which he was placed, even the stern hunter, who had never found himself in a painful dilemma, felt almost uncertain what course to pursue. A man less experienced and daring, or less cool and wary, would not only have been utterly lost, but every one he attempted to save would have shared the same fate. In that case, it is hardly necessary to say that this truthful narrative would never have been written.

The single-eyed hunter felt that the great crisis of his life had come, and he nerved himself to meet it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CRISIS.

His friends were still far beyond rifle-shot, and as he was satisfied that the Indians would not fire upon them till they were quite near, he had still time enough for any quiet scheme which would occupy but a moment in the execution, and could be accomplished without fail.

The flames were still burning rather slowly, and Cora was quite uninjured. To extricate her from the deadly peril surrounding her, and warn his allies of the danger in store for them, all in the presence of a quarter of a hundred blood-thirsty foes, was the slight task which devolved upon his single arm.

It was no wonder that in the grand peril of the moment Sim Simpkins forgot self, danger, everything save the work he had on hand. The thought that he might be killed never entered his head. Death at that time would have had no terrors for him, could his object but have been accomplished.

Within one moment after the last savage had entered the thicket, Simpkins sprung from it, knife in hand. He had noticed the exact manner in which the maiden had been bound to the tree, and knew exactly how the three cuts which it would require to liberate her must be given.

Six or seven bounds carried him to the spot, and in just one second of time the thongs were loosened. His rifle had previously been placed upon his back, and dropping his knife beside the fire, the hunter's strong arms were thrown about the maiden, and she was dragged forth.

Grasping her more firmly, the athletic scout sprung away, and sought the shelter of a large tree. There he placed his burden upon the ground, and directed her in which direction to run, with all speed. The poor maiden, half insensible from fear and torture, had given up all hopes of succor, and prepared herself for death, the cruel death which seemed unavoidable. But now, as she realized that assistance had really come, her energies returned, and she obeyed the behest of her deliverer with all possible expedition.

So general had been the attention of the savages to those who were approaching, that but a single Pawnee witnessed any part of the bold act, and he but saw the form of the hunter as

he dashed away. Quickly calling upon two of his companions, the three sprung up, and started in pursuit of the daring man, thinking he must be speedily overtaken, and both the whites dispatched without any alarm to the others, who were coming down in front. As the sequel proved, they were most sadly mistaken. Sim Simpkins had gained too much in his complicated scheme to be easily thwarted now.

No sooner did he glide behind the tree than his rifle was unslung, and the next moment its sharp voice spoke the death-note of one pursuer. Without pausing to note the result of his shot, or the course which might be taken by his foes, Sim sprung rapidly away, being but a few paces behind the flying maiden at the outset, and speedily gained her side.

The Indians are proverbially poor shots at a moving mark, however good they may be when firing from a steady aim at a stationary object. Of this peculiarity the scout had taken advantage, and though the exposure of himself and companion would seem suicidal to one unacquainted with the peculiar traits of the redmen, he had no fears of the few bullets which went whistling by them. True, a lucky chance was among the possibilities, but not probable.

Meantime his assistants, having heard the shots, were coming on at redoubled speed. To attract their attention, and keep them from rushing upon certain destruction, he gave a loud call, which they did not fail to hear. Having attracted their notice, he quickly warned them, by voice and sign, of the danger before them, and their direction was at once changed.

The Pawnees were far from realizing the aspect affairs were taking; and finding that their trap was discovered, they rushed forth, yelling wildly, and firing at any white they saw.

"Save your powder till they git closer," shouted Simpkins, seeing that some of his allies were upon the point of firing. "Hold yer fire, and I'll come tew ye."

They heeded the injunction, and with rifles presented, waited calmly for the coming of their foes, and those they had come to assist. The moral effect of this movement upon the savages was decided. Those three dark barrels, frowning down upon them, proved too much. Not one of the dozen who had started in that direction felt willing to incur certain death; and, while a portion of the force took to trees, and commenced reloading their weapons, the others set off toward Sim Simpkins and his charge.

The hunter had found no time to reload his rifle, but had in his belt a pair of unfailing pistols, on which he depended for aid should a critical moment come. Thus far he had steadily pursued his way, leading Cora by the hand, and rapidly pressing in the direction of her father and his companions.

Finding that the Indians were likely to cut him off before he could make the desired junction, the ready hunter gave a glance around, and sung out, to Frank's party:

"Make fur that big cottonwood, yender, quick as ye kin go! Then face about!"

Though the command was quickly given, it was perfectly intelligible, and the three men hastened to obey. The Pawnee warriors comprehended the movement, and endeavored to

turn it into a panic by rushing wildly after the white men. Failing in this, they were quickly brought up again when the three weapons, which they feared, were brought to bear upon them. Again they took to cover, eying their bold foes with supreme hatred, yet unable to punish them for their temerity.

Simpkins had not lost one moment's time, but changed his direction at the instant his confederates began to retreat. The result was that their force was united, and Cora was placed behind a tree just in the rear of her defenders.

"When ye see a piece of Injin flesh big enough to hit, blaze away at it, some of ye," said the master-spirit, "but don't all fire at once. Load up as fast as ye empty yer guns."

He rammed home his own ball at the time, and turned his piece to prime. As he did so, the Indians had generally finished the loading of their weapons. One, however, a trifle more dilatory than his fellows, was just withdrawing his ramrod. In doing so he exposed his head.

Instantly the terrible rifle of Simpkins leaped into the air, and its tongue of flame and voice of lead called for the brave's life. As he fell, another, who was quite near, thinking, perhaps, to rush upon their foe now that his weapon was empty, stepped from his tree. As he did so, Alvin fired, and the savage dropped with a bullet through his side.

"That's old Bunker Hill, yew fool yew!" shouted the elated young marksman.

"Ye'r' a good boy; load her up and give 'em ag'in!" said Sim, as he rammed his own bullet down.

The boy proceeded to recharge his weapon, but in doing so exposed his arm. An Indian instantly fired, and if Alvin had not fortunately pushed his elbow still further out, so as to allow the ball passage between that and the tree, his fighting propensities would have been checked for that day.

"Oh, fire away, dot rot ye!" he muttered, regarding the shreds of his frock, which showed where the ball had passed. "Ye feel drefful 'cause ye couldn't hev the most of yer own way, don't ye? But, look out fer yerselves, and I'll see tew Alvin."

A little reflection satisfied the hunter that their present position was not the most desirable possible, and after looking about him for a few moments, he spoke to Frank, who was next to him:

"You and Cora," he said, in tones just above a whisper, "must creep away, and git back to that thick clump of trees yonder. Ye see it, I s'pose."

Frank replied that he did.

"Then go—and go as keerful as ye kin. The rest of ye keep yer eyes out for any Injin what shows his head, and put a ball through it at first sight. Soon's you git thar plant yerself, and wait for us."

The last injunction had been given to Frank, as he was crawling stealthily away. The young man reached the side of Cora, and informed her of the contemplated movement. They proceeded together toward the spot, being as careful as possible not to attract the notice of the savages.

They were eminently successful, and reached the covert indicated in safety. No sooner had they disappeared from the eyes of their anxious friends than Simpkins began to communicate his plan to Alvin and his father.

"We must go like blazes," he said, "when we start. One of yo go kinder zig-zag, purty near straight there. T'other one run out tew that big cottonwood, and then bring up around behind the trees we're aimin' at. I'll take keer o' myself. Run like the Old Boy, and I'll resk the Injuns hittin' ye, ef they fire. Soon's ye git thar take yer rifles, and pick out an Injin; don't shoot a shot at random. Then, if they come on, give 'em yer pistols, and go intew 'em with the butts of yer guns. I'll resk but what we'll flax 'em out."

As the word was given they set forth, each running at the top of his speed. The Indians saw the movement, and sprung from their concealment to follow, not doubting but that their foes were making a final flight. In this, as in other matters, they were fatally deceived.

Sim Simpkins, followed closely by his faithful canine friend, sped over the ground with fearful strides, and gained the covert where Frank had preceded him, some moments in advance of his two confederates. The latter, indeed, were being hard pressed by their fleeter pursuers, and it is just possible that one or both of them might have been overtaken, but for the two quick reports which burst from the cover as they neared it, and laid two of the nearest pursuers upon the ground.

The others paused at this greeting, which they might have expected, and their momentary indecision allowed the father and son to gain a place of safety. But the Pawnees waited no longer. With a wild yell, firing their pieces at random, the savages charged full upon their retreat.

"Give 'em yer pistols!" shouted Simpkins, shooting down an Indian as he attempted to press between the two trees, at the same time giving the word to impatient Pinchers, who joined in the fray with a will. "The devils mean fight this time!"

The whites were well supplied with firearms for those anti-revolver days. Sim, Frank and Mr. Leonard each had a pair of pistols, while Alvin had a single antiquated weapon, upon which and Bunker Hill he prided himself, conjointly.

For a moment there was a sharp clashing of weapons, and a rapid firing on both sides. Indeed, a terrible hand-to-hand fight seemed unavoidable. Had the Indians pressed the matter, it is quite probable that the white men would have found themselves numerically deficient, notwithstanding the superiority of their arms. But the terrible lesson they had received, and the fall of more than a third of their number had taught the Indians to be wary, and finding that their foes had decided to flee no further, they resolved to abandon the contest. No doubt they must encounter friends in the forest, and with the aid of numbers sufficient to utterly crush the whites, they would avenge all past misfortunes.

Acting upon this principle, the survivors gradually withdrew, leaving their dead and

wounded as they had fallen. At first the whites could hardly realize their good-fortune. Simpkins, as usual, was the first to speak.

"Thar they go, confound the cusses!" he exclaimed springing from his shelter. "Come on, one of ye; let's chase 'em a little ways."

Alvin was the first to respond, and springing out at the side of his leader, the twain pushed on after the fleeing savages. To and through the council-camp they speed, and here Simpkins paused.

"We needn't go any further, boy," he said. "We can't overtake 'em, and'll only waste our breath for nothin'. Load up your gun, and here's some things we may need."

After they had reloaded, a hasty survey of the camp was taken. A large quantity of dried venison, which some savages had been thoughtful enough to provide, was secured, as were two axes, which had evidently been taken from some pillaged settler's dwelling.

"We'll take these along," he said; "they may serve us a good turn. Sech things are allus handy, espeshilly when thar's Injins 'round."

They selected such guns as seemed desirable, a quantity of ammunition, and Simpkins's knife which lay beside the still-blazing fire. This done, they hastened to rejoin their comrades.

The party was in good spirits, overjoyed and thankful at the good-fortune which had brought them all thus safely through such an ordeal.

"I'm sure we never can thank you enough—never hope to repay you, sir, for such benefits," said Cora, warmly. "Every hour increases our debt of gratitude, and lessens our means of payment."

"I ain't no more deservin' than the rest," returned Simpkins, coolly, as usual. "I couldn't have done anything without them, and maybe they wouldn't dew so well if 'twan't for me and Pinchers. But, never mind that. We must go now, and see tew yer mother."

"Yis, I s'pose the old woman'll feel a leetle oneeasy, if the Injins don't come across her," remarked her husband. "It seemed hard tew leave her alone, but we couldn't dew any better, so't had to be."

A line of march was at once taken up, and the party proceeded toward the retreat in the mountains, where they had left the mother. Each of them felt anxious in her behalf, now that the terrible ordeal had been passed with them, and hastened on as fast as possible.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MOUNTAIN STRONGHOLD.

The sweat poured from the brows of the men, and Cora was weak and tired as they ascended the mountain-side. Now that daylight revealed the natural roughness of the place, it became more than ever a wonder to his companions how their guide had been enabled to conduct them so readily and easily through the labyrinth in the darkness of night. In many places rocks were piled together in huge masses, while around and between them ran ravines and fallen trees. And yet the stranger trod them now with entire ease, and his companions had but to follow his lead to insure safety.

"It's all in bein' used to the thing," he remarked, in reply to some observation of his compan-

ions. "Yew could tread the streets in a big city whar I couldn't walk five minutes an' not git lost; but here in the woods I could find the way right ahead whar you'd be runnin' round and round, makin' nothin' out."

As they approached the place of rendezvous, more than one anxious glance was cast in the direction of rocky fastnesses, fearful lest some lurking savages might be awaiting their coming.

But finally they drew near the rocky retreat, and saw that all continued silent. Hope rose in their bosoms. There were no traces of Indians, and as Mrs. Leonard had been cautioned to keep very close till their return, it was hardly probable that she would espy them till the place was reached.

"Oh, I hope no harm has come to my dear mother," said Cora, as they drew near the spot; "I should think my own safety too dearly purchased, if she were to suffer."

As they reached the spot, Luman Leonard, in his anxiety, forgot all caution, and leaping among the rocks, he called out;

"Maria! Maria! Be ye here, anywhere? We've come—we're all right. Yer gal's safe."

A pale, frightened figure rose up before them, and in terrified accents exclaimed:

"Hush, Luman, for heaven's sake! The Indians are all about us."

The buoyancy of every heart was checked in a moment, and with pallid features they gathered close beneath the rocky breastworks, to learn what had transpired during their absence. Only Simpkins and his faithful mastiff remained upon guard, where they could survey the forest around.

"What is it about the Indians?" Frank asked, when the party disposed themselves in a listening attitude.

"I'll tell you all I know; that is, what I have seen," replied the still trembling woman. "Soon after you left, I raised my head carefully above the rocks, to see what sort of a place we were in. It was just light enough so that I could see, and not fully daylight. Almost the first thing that met my eyes was some one standing upon a rock just yonder. I saw at once that it was an Indian, and that he seemed looking for something. I did not wait to see if there were any more, but settled back very speedily, and lay there trembling for some time, not daring to look up, lest I should encounter a savage.

"But time passed on, and I began to think I might have been mistaken, after all; or, that the Indian had gone his way. I listened as closely as I could, and not hearing any movements, I gradually raised my head again. I looked where I had seen the savage standing, but he was gone. This gave me courage, and I looked all about, getting almost frightened at the wildness of the place, but seeing nothing of any living thing.

"Then I was satisfied that I had imagined all the evil I had seen, in the form of an Indian, and felt almost disposed to laugh at myself. I even rose to my feet and looked all round, to satisfy myself that I had been utterly mistaken. Then I sat down with a relieved heart, to wait for your coming.

"Then I heard sounds, and knew there could

be no mistake about them. There were persons talking, and at first I thought you had come back. But I listened, for I wanted to be sure. I knew, very soon, that it was Indians, for I could not understand a word, and their language sounded so strange. I would have looked out, but I did not dare to. I expected every instant they would come upon me, and carry me off or kill me. But none of them seemed to come near me, and I began to hope they had gone.

"I could hear nothing of them, and finally ventured to peep past the corner of the rock. I was terribly frightened to see them scattered along all above us, and I really expected they had seen me, and would come on to kill me. But they did not come, and next I heard your voices, though I was mistrustful at first that it was the Indians coming."

"Then ye don't know which way the critters went?" asked Simpkins, who had been an earnest listener, although his eye had been actively searching for any signs of Indians the while.

"No, I was not even aware that they had moved, until I looked about and saw that none of them were in sight."

"I never seen the critters act so funny afore," remarked the hunter. "Most naterally I'd think they would have gone on and done what mischief they could at the fu'st start. But here they seem tew be hangin' round, a hundred or more of 'em, jest tryin' tew ketch us. But I reckin we'll fool 'em yit."

As the woman seemed earnest and positive in her statements regarding the Indians, even describing the appearance of the warriors, and showing where they sat, a great curiosity was felt to ascertain what had become of them so soon. Simpkins, as usual, claimed that for his especial duty and privilege.

"Here is this dry meat," he said, unwrapping the bundle, which had been bound with thongs of deerskin, and placing it in their midst. "'Tis rather hard chawin', I know, but it'll serve very well if ye once git it swallered. While ye'r' makin' out a breakfast o' that, and I reckin ye'r' about hungry enuff, I'll go out and see what's acomin' of the human beasts."

Calling the faithful Pinchers to his side and giving him a small piece of the meat, the scout set off upon his uncertain mission.

On reaching the point indicated by Mrs. Leonard as having been occupied by savages, he found abundant evidence of the presence of a considerable party, who had but recently left the place. Her story was thus confirmed, and Sim began to feel more than ever that some scheme, which he could not comprehend, was being played by the Pawnees.

"Consarn 'en all, I'll fetch it out," he muttered, surveying the ground and casting quick glances into the forest about, "or my name ain't Sim Simpkins. The onwashed, or'nary thieves; tew use honest people so! But it's costin' 'em about all it comes tew, I reckin, so fur."

He looked at all the indications before and around him, and succeeded in finding two or three blind trails. But nothing seemed to give him any indication of the whereabouts of the Indians, or their purpose.

"I rayther incline tew think they've gone up

over the mount'in," he pursued, finding that all traces led in that direction. "I wonder if they hev gone for good?"

His doubts and wonder must have vanished very speedily, for at that moment, his cap of fur was lifted from his head, and fell in a cleft of rock beside him.

"Perty close, I declar'," he remarked, picking it up and eying the curl of smoke which rose from a cluster of bushes above him. "I may as well call that a finisher."

Instead of raising the cap to his head, he sunk forward and dropped his rifle. A yell of satisfaction broke from the concealed marksman, who left cover and sprung in the direction of his victim.

As he bent over to take the scalp, the red-skin might have fancied his victim to move. At the next instant a pistol cracked, and without a yell the warrior passed to the hunting-grounds of his Hereafter.

The wily scout at once commenced a retrograde movement from the place, and his pace was somewhat accelerated when a yell, long, loud and fearful burst from bush and rock above him. The savages who had been concealed, to the number of a score, broke from their hiding-places, and rushed toward the scene.

With a few rapid bounds, Simpkins gained the shelter of his rude stronghold, and the Pawnees followed at no great distance. Such firearms as they had were discharged, but their terrible enemy seemed to bear a charmed life. No ball of theirs injured him, while every report of his heavy rifle spoke a death-note to some brave.

Not till three of their number had fallen before the deadly rifles of their enemies, did the Indians pause in their onward career. Then they sullenly withdrew a short distance, and set themselves down to a regular siege of the place.

"That's very often the way it works," remarked Simpkins, as he took in the position of affairs, and ducked his head at the flash of a well-aimed gun. "A man may git out o' one scrape and intew another all day long, and maybe fer a week, but, if he's smart, he'll ginerally come out all right. Now and then one gits knocked over, as poor Billy Larkin did; but it's an evil day for the red-skins when they hurt him. It's cost 'em a few o' their best fighters a'ready."

"What do you think they mean to do?" asked Frank.

"Jest now I think they mean tew lay off all day, and when it comes dark slip up and murder us, if they can't dew it afore, without gittin' hurt."

"And we—what shall we do? Of course we cannot think of being butchered like buffaloes."

"Not quite. We'll contrive tew fool 'em some way. It's possible they may git tired of the fun, or make a rush and git whipped out afore dark. Another thing's jest possible; and that is, that both bodies, these and them what we tussled with this mornin', may git tew-gether, and whip us out. Thar's a good many ways it may go; we must wait and see. But take notice o' one thing: if ye see a red-skin's

pate stick up anywhar, dew yer best tew put a ball through it. That kind of sport may satisfy 'em sooner'n anything else."

"Kin I hit that one, cap'n?" asked Alvin, pointing to a small part of an Indian's head which appeared above a rock behind which he had taken refuge. "I kinder want tew sp'ile the looks o' that feather with old Bunker Hill."

"Yes, blaze away, but be keerful, and the rest look out that no gun pokes in sight through bushes or over rock, while ye'r' shootin'."

The boy seemed pleased at the favor, and bringing up his old favorite, took a steady aim. The gun cracked, and the feather disappeared; more than which was not to be ascertained. But inasmuch as nothing further was seen of a savage in that direction, it is to be presumed that the stripling's aim was not in vain. One or two keeping constant watch for any movement or exposure of their foes, the balance now devoted themselves to making a meal of the dried venison which had so opportunely fallen into their hands. Seeing that in the general excitement of the occasion the women, especially, were not disposed to eat, the scout cheered them up in his peculiar way.

"Ye must eat," he said, "and then sleep. We didn't rest any last night, and most likely thar's another night o' hard trampin' afore us; that is, if we escape the red-skins, and I reckin we'll dew that. Ye must keep up yer courage and strength, and thar ain't nothin' better for that than tew eat hearty. To be shure, that 'ere dry stuff ain't so nice for fodder as I hev seen, but it'll dew better'n nothin'. Course, now, you must eat, or ye can't tramp tew-night, and we'll hev ter leave ye, arter all."

The women attempted to eat, but the food seemed almost loathsome, and after several vain efforts, they were forced to desist.

"Never mind; if ye can't eat now, sleep awhile on it," urged the calm master-mind. "After a little nap ye'll both feel better, and then vittles'll dew ye more real good, maybe."

Yielding to his solicitations, which were coupled with those of Frank and Mr. Leonard, the weary mother and daughter lay down in the most comfortable spot which could be selected. Although they had no anticipation of being able to sleep, it was but a few moments ere the lids of both were closed, and they slept quietly for several hours.

When they awoke it was near noon, and they were quite hungry. The dried meat was again brought into requisition, and this time they were able to eat a tolerable quantity. They were very thirsty, but as water was quite out of the question for the present, they forced it from their minds.

The savages still maintained their vigils, and not a shot had been fired upon either side. Presently the Indians seemed anxious to test the wakefulness of their adversaries, and used several expedients for drawing their fire, which would have been successful but for the experienced counsels of Sim.

"Ye don't want tew fire till ye see a plump mark," he said. "One that ye know's alive, and that ye won't miss. There, jest see that streaked red-skin; he thinks we're all asleep up here."

One of the savages had sprung upright upon the rock behind which he had been crouching for some time, and made a few contortions of his body not utterly becoming, even to a Pawnee.

"Jest leave him to me," remarked Sim, as Mr. Leonard would have fired upon the Indian's partially exposing himself again. "I'll jest fix his dinner for him, in the best o' style."

By this time the Indian had appeared again, and several others were crawling from their covers.

"Take yer men—quick!" said the stern hunter, "and shoot when ye git a sure sight."

He fired as he ceased speaking, and his victim fell, uttering a wild yell. Three other reports were heard at the same time, and another Pawnee bit the dust, while two others evidently did not escape unscathed, so skillfully were the rifles of the whites served.

The effect was marked. Instantly a retrograde movement was instituted among the Indians, and they crept from the spot with commendable zeal.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT NIGHT BROUGHT.

"Good, if they are gone," remarked Frank, as the last of them disappeared from sight. "I began to think they intended keeping us here."

"Don't flatter yerself that there's any such good news yet," said Simpkins, shaking his head. "They wouldn't leave in that way if they karkilated tew go for good. It's more my idea that they're gittin' together tew counsel some deviltry, than anything better."

This hypothesis was confirmed very soon by the appearance, through the forest, of a distant fire. To this Sim called the attention of his followers, as confirmation of his suppositions.

"Thar it is, ye see, jest what I karkilated. They're goin' tew talk the matter over, and if they feel hungry it's very much their style tew eat. But we'll come in for a good share of their meditations. It seems they are bound to have us out of their way, in any case."

"While they are thinking over matters, why not take ourselves out of the way?" Frank asked. "We could crawl away and they never wculd be any the wiser for it."

"Not so easy as ye think, young man. I've sit ag'in' the red-skins for near or quite thirty years. I've seen 'em in about all that they've done for that length o' time, 'cause where the Injins hev been out on a rampage thar I was. Now I'll tell ye jest what I think. We hain't one chance in a hundred of gittin' away from here afore dark! We might dew it ourselves, but then here's the women to see to, and to git along. I tell ye we'd better make up our minds to stay whar we are, for the present."

"May be just as you say," replied the young man, though his tones seemed to indicate a slight amount of distrust. "I don't profess to know much about the woods. Only this I do know—it's pretty severe staying cooped up here all day."

"I know all that," replied the scout. "But then, it ain't nigh so tough as 'tis tew hev the

ha'r tuk off'n one's head. If you think the red-skins hev bid us good-day, ye kin jest move out a ways, and see."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Frank, a little sharply, for there had been a peculiar intonation to the hunter's voice as he spoke the last words.

"I mean if ye think it's so easy to fool the Injins, ye'd better try it on yer own hook. A man knwes nothin' about sech things till he's tried 'em."

Possibly Sim Simpkins was getting angry; certainly Frank Sherman was. He would have responded much more sharply, had not Cora noticed the turn affairs were taking and placed one hand restrainingly upon his arm.

"Pshaw, Frank; you inust not quarrel with him!" she said, firmly. "Think where we should be were it not for his help."

"I know that, but—" and Frank turned away. "I will be civil, for your sake, Cora," he added.

The stranger scout remained silent for some minutes, but finally turned toward Mr. Leonard and Frank, saying, in tones devoid of any emotion:

"If ye think ye kin dew better to go on, why, try yer luck. It ain't for me to say when or whar ye shall go, or when ye sha'n't go. If ye say try it, I'm with ye, if not one of us lives through it. Or, if some of you can do better nor I, go ahead. I ain't craviu' sech jobs as this, though I like to see it through when I once begin."

"I'm perfectly satisfied with what you've dono," replied Mr. Leonard, "and I guess all the rest are. I want ye to dew that that seems right tew ye, and all of us 'll be satisfied."

Alvin, with his mother and sister quickly followed in assuring Sim Simpkins of their approval and Frank Sherman could do no less than to qualify his manner.

"All I said," he remarked, "was that it was hard being cooped up here all day, with next to nothing to eat, and nothing to drink. But, if there's no help for it I'm quite as ready as any one to stand it."

Good feeling and oneness of purpose having been again established, or rather, a decided rupture having been prevented, affairs moved on in their former channel. No movement upon the part of the savages could be discovered and to the veteran scout himself it began to seem possible that they had really abandoned their intentions with regard to the whites.

"I'll soon find out," Sim said. "Keep yer eyes all in that direction, and I will try them a bit."

He crept from the retreat, and moved stealthily away in a direction opposite to the position of the savage camp.

Scarcely had he left the retreat, when a signal was communicated from some Indian spy unseen, and instantly a commotion was discernible about the distant fire. The scout made a short circuit and then returned.

"Ye see how the land lays," he remarked, sliding into the chasm which served them as a fortress. "They hed a pesky spy close by, tew watch all that was goin' on. If we'd tried tew

leave for good we'd 'a' found ourselves in a purty fix, jist arter we'd got away."

The appearance of sundry Indians, gradually creeping nearer, was additional proof of the truthfulness of his premises:

"Ye see we can't git away," he said, with truthful earnestness, "without being sot upon and dogged by them pesky varmints. It's possible we might worst them out, and keep up a runnin' fight along. But we'd stan' a great chance o' more or less on us gittin' killed, and lose it all arter the Almighty has helped us so fur along."

"Shall we shewt again, cap'n?" asked Alvin, who was uneasily fingering the lock of "Bunker Hill." "That feller over thar in the edge o' them bushes I could take, like open and shet."

"Blaze away, if ye want tew. We've plenty o' powder and balls, and it is cheaper to keep the red-skins at a safe distance than 'tis tew drive 'em back ag'in."

The impulsive youth blazed away, but missed his man. With a dissatisfied air he turned to reload his piece.

"Takes a hand o' experience tew tek' 'em every time," remarked Simpkins. "That feller was furder off than ye thort fer. See that one beyond him, off tew the left? He thinks he's parfictly safe, and maybe he is, fer Sim can't hit every time. But, I'll try him, that I will."

The tall hunter drew his heavy rifle up to his face, and took a very deliberate aim at the Indian, who was distant more than three hundred yards. When he fired the savage was observed to bound in the air, and disappear with loud yells. Those of the Indians who had exposed themselves hastily withdrew, and universal quiet again reigned.

"Yehev tew keep the critters cowed down and let 'em know ye'r on hand," remarked the scout, as he poured in the powder for another charge. "They're always inclined tew git sassy, if ye let 'em hev their head, the or'nary beasts!"

Long hours passed away without any further incident occurring to mar the dull routine of watch, converse and sleep. Each of the party, save the indefatigable Sim, slept for a short time, though the general anxiety concerning their situation was such as to preclude all long-continued slumbers.

As the sun sunk low behind the trees, the stern hunter urged another hearty repast of the dried meat, and though the party was suffering for water, they brought themselves to eat as much as could be swallowed of the unpalatable meat. They certainly felt stronger after it, and better prepared for the fatiguing duties which might be before them.

As the first faint evening shades began to be visible, the single eye of the hunter seemed to know no rest. Here and there it roamed, noting every movement of the Indians, who could still be seen in the forest beyond rifle range.

"We must go jest as quick as it's dusk enuff so the raskils can't see us," he said. "Ye can see that they're all wide awake now, and coming on as fast as they think 'twill dew. They daren't git very near, arter the lessons we've l'arned 'em, and that's lucky for us. We must

cut right over the mountain, and try tew find the highest settlements on t'other side. If we give the Injins the slip, we shall be all right. If we don't happen to dew that, it's onsart'in about the end."

Very slowly the twilight seemed to descend, but it came surely, and as there was no moon it would soon be quite dark enough for any practicable adventure. As the shades increased, it was evident that the Pawnees were approaching. Here and there a dusky figure could be seen, gliding cautiously nearer.

"We hev tew salute the infarnal critters again," remarked Simpkins: "See, there is one behind that little clump of hazel bushes. Tew of ye fire at that, and I'll shoot off whar I seen a sneak last."

There were three rifle-reports, almost at the same moment, and two distinct yells from the Indians, showing that powder had not been burned in vain.

"That's good," remarked Sim. "That's put 'em back a few, and while they're gittin' more careful we'll leave. Off with yer boots, and come on."

"Shall we not reload?" asked Frank.

"Not now; we won't stop for that. All we want is to git away, and make no fuss about it. We shall have our pistils if we meet any Injins, but that ain't what we want to dew. Off with yer other boot, and then we're ready for service."

So saying, he led the way very carefully from the rocky recess, and commenced climbing the mountain above them. It was now so dusky that objects could only be distinguished at very short distances, and there was very little danger of the movements of the party being overheard, as the men were obliged to pick their way barefooted over the unpleasant ground.

Pinchers moved with the group, seeming to feel the importance of his services; and certainly to his keen senses the party trusted more than to any powers of their own.

They moved some distance, more than a mile it seemed to those who were obliged to walk with bare feet through the various obstructions which they encountered, when their leader paused, and gently whispered:

"Ye kin put yer boots on now, if ye'll walk jest the stillest kind. But be awful keerful, cause there's no knowin' whar the varmints may be hangin' 'round."

Scarcely had they resumed progress when from beneath them came a yell, long, loud and fierce—which echoed and resounded far and wide, along the mountain-side.

"Ha! the raskils hev made a strike," remarked Sim with a silent laugh. "Hope they won't bluster and fume any over the skelps they'll git!"

A moment later a second whoop was heard, different in tone and character from that which had been given at first. That had been boisterous, exultant, savage; this was subdued, sullen, revengeful. It was evident that the Indians were unprepared to find their prey flown, and quite disappointed at the result.

No one in the fugitive party spoke, but all felt that the crisis of their fate was at hand. Silently, earnestly they pressed forward, up the

sharp ascent, and in due course of time were gratified by standing upon the summit.

Here their leader paused, and those who followed were not sorry to do the same, as the ascent had been quite fatiguing. It was now so dark that nothing beyond the immediate vicinity of the party could be distinguished. The expanse below and around appeared a second chaos. Nothing but vast and impenetrable darkness seemed over the face of the earth.

"What d'ye s'pose the Injins'll dew now?" asked Mr. Leonard, in a low whisper, as he found himself near Simpkins.

"A feller can't tell for sart'in," was the response. "But they will be most likely tew try and foller us."

"D'ye think they'll make out our trail?"

"S'pose so; why not? They're used to that kind o' bizniss all their lives, and it's only natural that they should know which way we've gone, pretty near."

"They'll overhaul us, arter all, won't they?"

"I guess not. We've got the start, and if they try to foller us in the night, even if they git the trail, it's purty sart'in they can't gain much on us. But we've fit 'em once or twice, and can dew it ag'in if the pinch comes."

Having regained breath the party set forward, continuing upon the crest of the mountain for a short distance, and then commencing the descent. It was slow, fatiguing, vexatious, and even dangerous work, in the thick blackness which lay upon the forest. The latter term could hardly be applied appropriately to the mountain-surface, as the principal productions in that vicinity were rocks and bushes. Some distance below them the trees were of vigorous growth, and toward this point they were tending. When the forest should be reached, the traveling would be easier.

CHAPTER X. THE SECOND NIGHT.

THE party gained the shelter of the trees, and though the blackness was still more intense, they proceeded with greater ease, since the undergrowth had ceased and nothing save rocks and fallen trees obstructed their way.

At length they reached the level ground, when Simpkins, who was in the advance, paused and plucked his companions cautiously by the arm as they came up. At the same time he pointed in advance.

By peering through the trees they were able to distinguish a single bright spot, far in advance, which could have proceeded from nothing but a camp-fire.

"What d'ye s'pose we've got there?" asked Mr. Leonard.

"Another nest of red-skins, I karkilate," was the cool response.

"Then we may jest as well give up all hope," remarked the desponding man. "They're all sides of us, and all round us. I'm almost tired of fightin' 'em all the while. A feller might as well be killed off fu'st as last."

"Maybe that's the way you feel," remarked Simpkins, "but it seems tew me ye orter be a leetle ashamed of it. Don't yer keer any thin'

about yer wife and children? Now, it never was my fortin' tew hev sech a gal as you've got, nor a wife either for the matter o' that. But if I did, you'd see me fight for 'em if I didn't keer any thing about myself! My advice to yew is when ye git back out o' the way o' these Injuns, don't ye never come whar they'll hev a chance at ye ag'in."

"I won't, ye needn't be any afraid of that," was the quick reply. "I thought there warn't any sech place as the West; nor there ain't in civil times. But if this is the way they use a feller, I'll give the Injins my house and I'll stay back in the States."

"We are not in a fair way to reach the States, as yet," remarked Frank. "Sometimes I doubt much if we shall ever get there. The Indians seem to be out in great force, and it would be nothing astonishing if they should outwit us at last."

"Have patience, my good folks," said Simpkins, preparing to lead the way forward again. "The red-skins have got the advantage in numbers, but that's about all. Long as they're on foot, they're afraid of us. It's lucky they bain't got any horses, though that wouldn't help 'em much in this part of the country. Still they're afraid on us, and darsn't close right in 'less they think thar's some advantage on their side. We must get up a little nearer, and then I'll go and see what this new fangle is."

They moved on, nearly in the direction of the strange fire for some time, and it needed no injunction to cause the party to proceed silently. There was a faint possibility that the light before them might proceed from a friendly camp, though that was hardly probable, from the very nature of things. If not, there was but one other possibility—they were still in the midst of foes.

Halting his party at the distance of half a mile from the fire, Simpkins crept forward alone, in order to dispel all doubts relating to the matter, the uneasy manner of Pinchers giving him little doubt but that he should find another swarm of savages on the war-path.

He had proceeded a little distance when his eye encountered a second light, away to the left. Startled at the discovery, he glanced quickly about, but saw nothing of any more. He had proceeded but a few steps further, however, when another, bearing to the right, appeared. Somewhat undecided how to act, he paused for a moment, to take in more fully the situation.

The three fires which he had, thus far, discovered, were separated by about equal distances. The first which had been seen was directly before him, and nearly half a mile away. The others were situated, one upon each hand, about the same distance from the central fire and himself.

This did not look exactly like the disposition Indians would make of themselves, nor was it the manner in which the whites would be most likely to encamp. Even the sage hunter was somewhat perplexed.

"I'll go right ahead, as I started tew," he finally muttered. "Most likely it's Injins, but I'll find out for sartain. If thar's any more danger in goin' this way than some other, I don't

know it, and guess the danger ain't so much for me as fer the red-skins, if they molest a feller."

The latter supposition might appear quite reasonable in consideration of the fact that Simpkins carried two rifles, one of which was slung across his back, the other being in his hands for ready use.

He proceeded along quite rapidly till sufficiently near the scene for any incautious movement to attract attention, and then it was that his life-long schooling began to tell in his favor. He crept up, getting closer at every moment, but was unable to determine what he wished most to ascertain. He found that the light of the fire was rapidly fading away, and very soon it would be next to impossible to distinguish white from red.

One of the dwellers beside the fire seemed impressed with the same idea, though from a different motive. Rising from his recumbent position in the shadow, he placed a handful of fagots upon the fire, and then relapsed into his former listless attitude.

But the few moments of his exposure had been sufficient to convince the peering hunter in regard to those matters of which he had previously doubted. Stealthily as he had come did he crawl from the place, musing to himself:

"So it's red-skins, jest as I suspected. Nothin' wrong about that, only we shall have tew take kind of a roundabout way, which ain't much tew my likin'."

Simpkins was proceeding leisurely along, contemplating and reconsidering the events of the past four-and-twenty hours, when he was startled by the snap and flash of a gun, scarcely six feet in advance of him. Unseen by the scout, a savage had dogged his footsteps for a short distance, and then glided in front of him, snapping his gun close to the brave hunter's heart. But Providence had other work for Sim Simpkins. The weapon missed fire.

Instantly the startled man sprung upon his almost unseen adversary, aiming a heavy blow at him with the gun he carried. The Indian, singularly enough, changed his piece at the same moment, and their blows met in the air. Neither of the combatants were injured, nor were their strong weapons shattered by the stroke.

Dropping his gun at the moment the blow was given, Simpkins rushed upon the savage, and caught him in his arms. The struggle which followed was short. The Pawnee dropped his gun and tried to grasp his terrible antagonist; but finding that he failed in this, allowed himself to be thrown to the earth, while he fumbled vigorously for his knife.

Had he succeeded in producing that weapon, it is quite possible that the white man would have suffered; but it stuck in the sheath, and while he was vainly tugging with one hand to loosen it, Simpkins's more ready weapon pierced his heart.

"Thar goes another confounded fool!" mused the victor, wiping his knife and placing it in the sheath again. "As if he expected tew whip out Sim Simpkins alone—a job what no half-dozen red-skins ever done yet. Some tender-hearted critters say it's wrong tew kill a man, even tew

save yer own life, but I never seen it in that way. When sich raskils as these git abroad, the sooner they're planted the better it is, fer them and everybody else."

Meditating thus, and feeling as unconcerned as though no human life had lately taken its departure at his bidding, the ranger sought out his comrades.

They were where they had been left, waiting anxiously for him, and desiring to know the success of his mission.

"It's jist what I expected," he replied, to their eager questions. "Thar's Injins out thar, but I reckin most of 'em air goin' tew sleep, so we sha'u't be afeard of 'em. Ye see we shall hev ter make suthin' of a circle round, so as not to disturb 'em much, and I reckin the hornets'll keep their nest."

The party set forth, taking the roundabout way indicated and pursued by their guide. As much time had been lost, they traveled fast to make up for the loss in delays and circuitous progress.

They had gone but a short distance when a wild distant yell rose through the forest, and reached their startled ears. One and all, save the scout, paused in dismay, while one of the females asked:

"In mercy's name, what is that?"

"Nothin' of any consequence," returned Simpkins. "I hed a little squabble with one of their braves when I was away, and he hed the misfortune to git the wu'st of it. I reckon they've found his defunct karkass, most likely."

He had not intended to communicate his adventure to them, knowing it must naturally make them more uneasy. But, as there was no way to avoid it now, and he did not think the savages could find his trail, he communicated the fact to them, in order that they might feel no unnecessary apprehensions.

"We've got tew much the start of 'em tew be tracked out," he added, "if they try ever so hard. Course they'll feel bad, and make suthin' of an adew. . . But let 'em sweat. While they're about that, we'll be travelin'."

They proceeded for some time, walking as rapidly as the darkness would permit. They were traveling in a direction at right angles to the one they wished to pursue, but as this was taking them away from the Indians, they thought less of extra travel than present danger.

Suddenly Sim stopped short, and even his usually strong heart gave a quicker bound than usual, as he heard the sharp yelp of an Indian dog behind them. The animal could not be very far behind, and his yelps, given at short, regular intervals, served, no doubt, to guide on a pursuing party of Pawnees.

"Confound the cusses!" exclaimed the hunter, and he might have used a stronger expression in connection; "they've got a dorg, and the cuss is trackin' on us! Here," and he turned to Frank, who was next him to the right, "cut off square this way, and I'll go back and fix the dog. Quick, now; there's no time to be lost!"

They turned in the direction indicated, and then Sim Simpkins faced about upon his self-imposed task. Hastening back a few paces, he snatched a pistol from his belt, and dashed some

fresh powder into the pan. Then crouching low, he awaited the coming of the animal he proposed to destroy.

Presently the wolf-dog appeared, his nose close to the ground, and following the trail at a brisk trot. He did not seem to espy the crouching white man until his nose was almost upon him. Then he stopped, sniffed and growled, but offered no assault to the person in his path. Not so the hunter. He realized very well that no time was to be lost, and leveling his weapon at the beast's heart, he fired. Of course his shot was not thrown away, at such close quarters, and the unfortunate animal dropped struggling to the earth.

Quickly following the report came a chorus of yells from Indian lungs, and the scout found that pursuers were nearer than he had anticipated. He did not reflect how to meet them. Replacing the discharged pistol in his belt, he raised the rifle he held in his left hand, and fired it in the direction of the approaching Pawnees.

A cry of rage and discharge of weapons followed, but Simpkins was not harmed. He had stepped behind a tree after firing, charging his gun as he did so. A moment later his second shot rang out, and from the cries which followed, he fancied it had not sped in vain.

Judging that this greeting would delay the Indians a short time, till they could study out its nature, he turned upon his heel, and sought his companions. Of course they were greatly alarmed at the firing, and probably not one of the party really expected to behold the form of their brave deliverer again.

But he rejoined them with his usual calmness, only whispering, as he passed them:

"We mustn't lose any time now. I've sot 'em back a trifle, and if we hurry, I reckon 'twill bother 'em tew find us ag'in, seein' they hain't got another dorg tew nose their way for 'em."

That the check they had received did not long delay the Indians was soon apparent, as their footsteps could be heard in the forest, passing along with less than their usual caution. But they appeared to have lost the trail, and were uncertain which way to proceed. While they were in this state of uncertainty it was possible their intended victims might escape them.

"Off with yer boots ag'in," whispered the scout. "They don't know whar tew look for us, and we mustn't tell 'em. We've got tew go still, or they'll hev the skin off'n our heads."

Though their feet were still sore and smarting from their former barefoot tramp, the men did not hesitate a moment, but taking their boots in hand followed their leader, while Pinchers was stationed in the rear to give notice of the approach of the red-skins.

Very silently the party stole along through the woods, hearing abundant evidence behind them that the savages were looking for victims. But they encountered none of them, and after a time had the satisfaction to lose all sounds of any presence save their own party.

"Now, boys, ye kin put on yer boots ag'in," said Sim, "and we'll try 'em a pull right ahead. We've gi'n 'em the slip, jest the neatest it war ever done, I reckon."

They did so, and then the bold ranger sped

onward, merely cautioning his companions to tell him when they could not keep pace with him.

Suddenly he recoiled, and barely prevented himself from slipping into a creek which ran before them. It was much broader than they could leap, and of uncertain depth.

"Well, well, here's a purty fix!" he muttered, casting his eyes as far as possible in the gloom, up and down the stream. "I'd forgot all about this here, though many's the time I've crossed it myself."

CHAPTER XI.

MORNING DAWNS.

"GOSH, we kin wade that; who's afeard?" demanded Alvin, stepping forward, as though to plunge into the stream. "Can't we, mister?"

"Guess not, quite. Ye'll find it over yer head, 'speshilly this time o' year," was the response. "I know all about this place. We shall hev to find some way to make a bridge, unless these women can swim."

"There's nobody here that can swim, but Frank," returned Mr. Leonard.

"Then we're in a purty fix," responded the guide. "But it's no use use cryin' over a split plate, or a dead b'ar, so we must dew the next best thing. We must look for a place tew cross, and not lose any time about it either. If I remember right thar's an old beaver dam down below, I'm sure it must be below, whar I've trapped the furry critters more nor one day. It's the wrong way tew go, fer it's takin' us right down ahind the Injins; but it can't be more nor a couple of miles, and we'll hev tew take the risk. If we can git thar we can cross the stream easy enuff, and then thar will be a straight road ahead, till we git tew the first settlements. It'll be a purty long tramp, but then we kin dew it easy 'nuff, if the Pawnees 'll let us alone —the mischief-making beasts!"

By this time the party had changed their course, and were proceeding down-stream. The creek had many a long meander, and it was something of a difficulty to follow its windings; but Simpkins was uncertain where the dam was to be found, as several years had passed since he last visited the place, and it was necessary to keep very near the channel, in order that their only bridge might not be missed.

There were thickets and swamps, almost without number, in their way, which the inky blackness concealed until they were entangled beyond possibility of avoiding. But they had learned to count toil lightly, and struggled on with hopeful zeal.

At length they reached a portion of ground where the water had been backed up, and overflowed the banks for some distance. The hunter paused, and after studying the features of the place a few moments, said:

"This here's the place, sure as ye're born. I've been here tew many times ter be fooled easy. Yes, I know this old cottonwood; and that big stump, jist beside o' ye, is one that I cut down, years ago. It ain't more nor thirty rods down to the dam. Come on out this way

so's tew git round the water, and then, good-by, Mister Injin!"

The party in general seemed highly pleased at their prospective escape, but none more so than the veteran scout. He led them through the forest in the manner of one quite at home, and presently turned his face again toward the river.

They had passed the swamp, and as they trod upon firm, hard ground, none of the party doubted that they should soon escape all danger. But before the guide had proceeded many yards in the new direction he stopped, and bent forward in a listening attitude.

A quick sniff and growl from the faithful Pinchers had put him upon guard, since the canine monitor never gave false alarms.

"'Sh-h!" he whispered, stopping his companions by a movement of his hand. "The dorg smells suthin'; we must find out what the matter is, afore we git intew danger."

Even as he spoke, there came a sharp yelp from the forest in advance of them, and an Indian dog dashed through the woods. The scout gave an almost imperceptible signal to his dog, who at once grappled with the Pawnees' cur with such vigor as to deprive him of life very speedily.

A rustling could be heard in the direction whence the dog had come, and it was evident that the savages were coming on to see what had disturbed their sagacious animal. The whites were much frightened, with the exception of Simpkins. He was perfectly cool, and communicated his intentions in low, distinct whispers.

"Fall back here a little," he said, "and form a line. Hev yer rifles all ready, and if the Injins find us, fire in, and then charge 'em with a yell. I'll warrant they won't wait fer a second dose. But I don't think they will find us. There, stan' whar ye be, and see what will take place."

Grasping their weapons, the anxious party, with the women in the rear, waited the movements of their natural foes. The latter, evidently surprised at the silence of their dog, came along very cautiously, till one of the braves discovered the bleeding carcass. They gave it a hasty examination, and then, with every appearance of utter terror, hastened back into the darkness from which they had emerged.

"Jest what I karkilated on," remarked Simpkins, with his peculiar, silent laugh. "The critters thort that their dorg was fit by a painter. Jest the thing, fer they might as well fall intew the jaws o' a painter as of Pinchers. Now we'll try ag'in, and see if we kin find the dam."

They moved more cautiously than before, knowing the dangers which they braved. Their weapons were in readiness for instant use, and bold indeed must have been the Indian horde which dared attack that small but determined band of whites.

Croeping along steadily, the little party soon gained the vicinity of the old dam, which had been built before white men invaded the haunts of the cunning natural architects, or the Indians had learned the superiority of their foes. The

colony had long since been exterminated, and only the remains of their work existed, to save the fugitive party from destruction.

They were almost ready to set foot upon it, Sim leading the way and feeling out a safe path, when he uttered a low sound of caution, and immediately crept back.

"Down! Down, and lie close," he whispered. "Thar is somethin' ahead, I can't say what, but most likely 'tis Injins. Hev yer guns ready in case they find us."

Crouching to the earth, they waited in breathless suspense for the development. There was a pale glow of stars, and by the uncertain light they soon descried dark forms, crossing the old dam, and coming toward them. Now and then an outline was presented against the sky, leaving no doubt that the strangers were Indians.

One after another crossed and passed on into the forest till seven had gone, and no more seemed to be coming. They had not discovered the whites, nor did they seem to suspicion the presence of any save their own people.

Thankful for their continued good-fortune, the adventurers rose to their feet again, and began the task of crossing the creek.

It was far from being easily accomplished. The action of water for years had worn away the movable portion of the dam, and only a few trees, partially driftwood remained. In the darkness it was a matter requiring great skill and nicety for a person to cross this uncertain structure without slipping into the water beneath.

But even the prospect of a severe wetting was more agreeable than that of falling into the hands of Pawnee warriors, and the attempt was at once made. Sim Simpkins went first, leading Mrs. Leonard, who crawled over the rude supports fearfully; while Frank followed, performing a similar office for Cora. Luman Leonard and his son brought up the rear, keeping their ears open that the Indians did not come down upon them. Pinchers, too, remained upon the shore till the party had reached the opposite bank, when he quietly took to the water and swam across.

After leaving the vicinity of the stream they found the way quite open, the forest being free from underbrush, and the ground level. They met with no further signs of savages, and after three or four hours' travel began to congratulate themselves upon their good-fortune.

The more timid—naturally the most easily elated, as well as discouraged—began to feel that all danger was past. This hope, coupled with the excitement which had been constant for more than thirty hours, enabled the weary ones to journey forward at a rapid pace. They realized well that life, and more than mere life, depended upon their own unaided efforts.

Time passed, and it seemed morning must be near. Still they journeyed on, though their steps had begun to lag, and it seemed that the women, especially must soon sink to the earth, unable to proceed further.

"How much further afore we take a rest?" asked Luman at length, dashing away the sweat which rolled from his brow, cool as was

the night. "I s'pose we ain't nowhere near any house yit."

"Houses; Lord bless ye, no! We ain't more'n half-way from the creek tew the nearest settlers, if we've gone right, and I'm nothin' sure about that."

"The wimmin-folks are gittin' awful tired," pursued the first speaker hesitatingly.

"So I reckon; and so I guess yew air," was the response.

"Ye ain't fur from right in that."

"Well, I s'pose," and the tall scout hesitated before he added, "I s'pose ye might as well lay down and rest what ye kin till daylight. I'm more used to this kind o' work, and ain't sleepy, so I'll stan' guard. Pinchers and me kin keep the red-skins away till daylight, I guess."

Accordingly a suitable place was selected, and the tired party of adventurers sunk upon the bare earth. True, they had no softer couch than nature afforded, and no covering but the sky. Still, in a very few moments the whole party was sleeping soundly.

Sim Simpkins had taken upon himself the duties of scout and sentinel. After waiting till the entire party slept, he posted Pinchers in their midst, and then strolled leisurely back, in the direction whence they had come. Finding all still in this quarter, the hunter gradually extended his circuit, and moved about the bivouac of his sleeping companions until he reached a point nearly opposite. Here he paused, and placing one hand upon a stump, gazed fixedly at the tree-tops for some time.

Whatever might have been the subject of his thoughts, it seemed to have been dismissed, and he was upon the point of returning, when a natural question presented itself. Whence came the stump upon which his hand rested? It had been cut but recently; more than that, it had been cut with an ax, and by one well skilled in the use of that tool.

These circumstances awoke a train of reflections. They were not in a district frequented by trappers, and that class of men who would pause and build temporary habitations. It was on no ordinary route of travel to the few settlements which were scattered beyond that point. No temporary band of hunters would cut such a tree; whence, then, came its destruction?

"It's been a good many years since I's off this way," he reflected, "and it's a leetle more'n probable that some chap may hav settled down here afore this time. I'll look a little, and see if thar's any prospect o' that."

The thought had merely struck him with regard to possibility; he had scarcely supposed it probable that any living being had settled thus far away in the forest. For a hundred miles beyond them he knew settlers to be sparse, and it certainly seemed more likely that they would fill up the regions already marked out, before pushing further into the wilds of the Indian-roamed forest.

Yet as he proceeded, the surprised scout encountered fresh stumps, all cut in the same manner, and showing the act of a single hand. His first suspicions almost confirmed by the repeated proofs which he encountered, he looke'

earnestly for any traces of a dwelling, or anything which should relieve his uncertainty.

He was still proceeding carefully, using eye and ear in the thick gloom which surrounded everything, when the bark of a dog struck upon his ear, and startled as well as satisfied him. Knowing that the animal belonged to some white man, as it had not the wolfish yelp of an Indian dog, he bent his steps in that direction, the sentinel keeping up an incessant uproar all the while.

In the excitement of the moment Sim had scarcely noticed that he was upon the border of a clearing, in the center of which, faintly revealed by the starlight, he could see the outline of a small building, evidently the object of his search. Even now he fancied there was a bustle within, and presently a sound as of bars being moved, reached his ear. Meanwhile the dog had placed himself full before the tall scout, and seemed inclined to dispute his further progress.

Determined to run a small risk, rather than stand the danger of a hasty shot, Simpkins placed himself behind a stump, and cautiously sung out:

"Hilloa, in thar!"

There was no reply, and after waiting a moment, the concealed hunter repeated the call.

"Hallooa yerself!" came back the response. "Who be ye, and what ye arter?"

"Ever heern o' Sim Simpkins?"

"Reckin so; I've fit and hunted with him a year. Is that you?"

"Me, if I know myself. Is that Sam?"

"Sam Garvey, as true as ye live!"

The two men advanced to each other. They had not met in long years, and the greeting which followed was more than cordial in its nature. After a hearty hand-shaking, and a few rapid sentences exchanged, Sim broke the thread of questions, which his comrade would have poured forth, by saying:

"Thar's three men and a couple o' wimmin-folks out in the woods yender, what's laid down tew sleep. Been hevin' a pesky time with the Injins, and got all fagged out. Why can't I bring 'em intew yer shanty here, whar they'll hav suthin' over their heads?"

"Don't ask me no sich question as that, Sim Simpkins," returned the other. "Darn my two eyes, if I wouldn't give up every inch o' mv shanty tew ye, if 'twar needed! But 'tain't; thar's rewm enuff for us all, sech as 'tis."

"Then I'll hurry on and tell 'em, Sim. We kin talk over old times afterward."

"Bring 'em on. D'y'e s'pose they're hungry?"

"Hungry! I guess so. Hain't eat nothin' but a little 'Injin chip' fer a day and tew nights. Shouldn't wonder if they was hungry."

He departed, well knowing from the disposition of the man he parted with what would be the result of the question and reply.

"Really, this is a Godsend," he mused, retracing his way through the forest. "These poor folks will hav a chance tew git suthin' of a rest and suthin' tew eat. Then they can go on with all the comfort in the world."

He found the party sleeping as he had left

them, and at once set about awaking them, saying, in cheery tones, as each pair of eyes opened:

"Come on; I've found a comfortabler place than this; one with a ruff tew it!"

The awakened sleepers asked but few questions, but were soon ready to follow their guide.

As they left the place the first faint beams of morning light could be seen, illuminating the far distant horizon. But none the less dark was the gloom which hung over the forest about them.

CHAPTER XII.

OLD FOES.

It took the party but a few moments to reach the little cabin, and at the door they were met by the owner, with a lighted pine splinter in hand.

"Come right in," he said, with hearty good will, throwing wide the door. "I hain't a nice house tew ask ye intew, but it's better'n a snooze on the bare ground, tew them what's used to hevin' ruffs over their heads."

They entered, and found themselves in a simple, tidy apartment, extending the entire size of the cabin. On one side was a large fireplace, built in the primitive manner. A small kettle, filled with coffee, was beginning to simmer over the blaze, and a choice lot of bear-steak was broiling upon the coals.

In a short time the hospitable entertainer had drawn out a small table, of his own manufacture, and spread a comfortable repast upon it. There was smoking hot coffee, savory steaks of bear-meat, good corn-bread, and a few minor dishes. The adventurers were surprised, as well as gratified at this unexpected good fortune. They did not require a second bidding to "set up and make themselves 'tew hum,'" but fell to with an alacrity and gusto which was certainly flattering to Sam Garvey's pride as host and cook.

While they were eating, himself and the one-eyed hunter were conversing earnestly.

"I never should have dreamed of seein' Sam Garvey settled down in sich a place as this," remarked Simpkins. "When we used tew trap and trail it together, I reckoned you'd allus follow that kind o' business, till ye went up some natural way."

"So I did used tew think," was the reply. "But, I've made up my mind differently now. I got hurt one day in the woods all alone. A wounded buck sprung at me. I went tew jump one side, but ketched my foot in a root, what I hadn't seen, and tumbled down. Along comes the buck, and jest plants his forward feet on my back. 'Twas lucky I hed a pistil; if I hadn't I should ha' gone under in jest tew minnits and a quarter. I drawed the thing out, and put the muzzle right ag'in' the critter's heart. Jehosaphat! How he went intew the air when I fired! Down he come, right atop of me, and arter kickin' round a spell, kinder eased off and died. I tried tew crawl out from under him, but couldn't dew it. Ye see the critter was bu'stin' fat and heavy, and laid right square across me. Besides, where his huffs had hit I

could feel plain enough that the hide and meat was off slick ter the bones, an' I wa'n't sart'in but what they was broke, tew. He'd struck me a half-dozen times, at least, afore I got my pistil out, and then fell onto me.

"I couldn't think of but one way ter git clear. I reached round, fur as I could, and managed tew git hold of my knife. 'Twas sharp, and I had some strength in my arms, so I went to work, tryin' ter cut the deer in tew. 'Twa'n't nothin' of a small job, the way I lay, and the way I's bruised up. But every time I drawed the knife made one less, and finally I had it all done but onj'intin' his backbone.

"That warn't done easy—no, sir! I worked and poked and pried and begun tew think I'd hev tew give up arter all. But by'n by I got the p'int o' the knife intew the right place, and she giv'. Ye may bet I felt as if a load was gone then! I managed to turn over a little, and purty soon I had the deer in tew piles, one on each side on me.

"Wal, thar I was. I tried to git up, but couldn't dew it. However, I drawed myself along, half a rod or so, and found an easy place to lay. Thar I stretched out, and lay an hour, afore I knew anything, only that I'd got free. Finally I begun tew think o' gittin' up, but found that wa'n't no easy job. Still, I made out tew do it, and arter I'd walked about ten rod I lay down ag'in. I found I wa'n't goin' tew git home that way. Then I begun tew think what I should dew. The rest of my fel-lers was off three miles, and wouldn't come to look for me till next day, if they did then. I found I'd got tew wait for 'em, any way. If I lived, I should live; if I died, die I must; it could not be avoided.

"After a while I crawled back tew the carkiss of the deer, and cut off sech parts as I wanted. Then I got away, maybe twenty-five rods, though it took me more'n one hour to do that. I lay and rested awhile, and then I built up a fire, and roasted my meat. By this time it was about night, and I eat what I could and lay down to try and sleep.

"I didn't dew much o' that, but managed tew git through the night, some way. Mornin' come, and in about an hour I begun tew load and fire my rifle.

"As I fancied, my comrades had started out to look for me, and soon found me, by the report of the gun. They carried me back to camp, and did the best they could for me. But it was a hard case. For weeks they thought I would die. But you see I didn't.

"Arter I got well I begun tew think I'd followed that kind o' life long enuff, so I went back to the fu'st settlements, and tried tew find some chances fer doin' suthin' else. But nothin' jest suited me, so I concluded tew come back in here, and squat on a piece of land and raise part of my livin', and bunt for the rest. So I did, and last spring I made a strike. I had it fu'st rate here, though it's rather lonesome."

"How fur to the next settlement?" asked Simpkins.

"Ten miles, and a plain trail all the way."

They conversed for some time longer, and then Sim expressed his intention of seeking a few hours' sleep.

"I rayther think we've fooled the Injins, arter all," he said. "Besides, Pinchers will give ye warnin', if thar should be any danger, and ye'll wake me up anyway, by noon, so't we kin git tew the next settlement afore dark."

Garvey promised that he would awaken the party in due time, and then Simpkins threw himself upon the floor. He slept very soon, and only the breathing of the exhausted sleeper could be heard above the gentle sighing of the forest within.

An hour passed—two—and only now and then a faint moan from some of the sleepers as they moved uneasily; always followed by a corresponding sigh from Sam Garvey.

"Poor souls," he mused pityingly; "it's tew bad fer 'em tew hev sech a hard run. 'Tain't nothin' for us rough ones, what is used tew Injins, tew hev a brush with 'em once in a while. But jest sech chaps as them, right from civilization, and used tew livin' peaceable lives, an' goin' wbar they're a mind tew—it's tew bad they've had sech a time!"

He was proceeding with his mental soliloquy, when a low growl from the dogs without drew his attention. He hastened to the opening which served as a window and looked out. The animals were crouching low beneath the aperture, and both had their gaze fixed in the forest.

"That says Injins," remarked Sam, "if I know myself. What can the critters be arter?"

He called the dogs inside and barred the door. Before this operation was performed, Sim Simpkins had taken the alarm, and was upon his feet beside his host.

"Is it Injins!" he asked, in a whisper.

"So the dogs say," replied Sam. "I hain't seen any of 'em yit, and if 'tis, maybe they'll go their own way and not disturb us."

"Possibly. But ye needn't karkilate much on that, 'cause it's contrary jist now to Pawnee Injin nater."

Garvey stepped to the wall and took down his piece, which he reprimed, and slipped a pair of pistols into his belt. Simpkins performed the same office for himself, and then cautiously took up the rifles of his companions, and renewed their priming.

By the time this was done, Garvey, who had been upon the lookout, stepped near to him and whispered:

"Ye kin see the red-jackets now, if it's anything of a rarity tew ye."

Simpkins stepped to the window and looked forth. In the edge of the forest, distant some seventy-five yards, could be seen the forms of half a dozen savages, moving hither and thither, evidently intent upon making out the character of the strange building before them.

The one-eyed hunter recognized them at a glance as Pawnees, and communicated the same to his companion.

"Then we're in for one more brush with the reds together," Garvey remarked. "I'm a'most glad of it; 'twill seem like old times."

"Here they are, on this side, too," remarked Simpkins. "The devils are about ready to begin fightin'. Perhaps we'd better put ourselves in shape, and see what we kin dew toward openin' the dance, particularly as we're to be the fiddlers."

Frank, Mr. Leonard, and Alvin were awakened, and briefly informed of the danger which threatened them.

The cabin had been pierced with appropriate loop-holes, upon all sides, so that the Indians could not approach without subjecting themselves to the aim of the whites. The walls of the building being composed of logs, were quite bullet-proof, and there seemed but little prospect of danger to the defenders.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST FIGHT.

IT is contrary to the rules of Indian warfare to attack a place in broad daylight. Any time during the night or soon after morning light, is considered much better, as they will be more likely to effect a surprise in such cases. But now the Indians had encountered this strange building far from the habitation of other whites, and they felt almost certain that their intended victims were there. Feeling that they had already lost too much time in the fruitless endeavor to destroy this party, they concluded to make an onset at once, and break in upon them if any resistance should be offered. As there were nearly two-score warriors, they did not for an instant doubt their ability to overpower the white men without any material loss upon their own part.

Half a dozen braves, who panted to distinguish themselves, were allowed to go on in advance, and sound the disposition of those they came to conquer. This was the party whose approach called every man to his post.

The six braves proved faithful if not wise, in the performance of their mission. Upon gaining the door, which they were suffered to do unmolested, one or two of them rapped with the handles of their hatchets, and rattled the latch, which had been effectually fastened.

"What d'ye want?" demanded Garvey, from within.

"Want to come in—want to see who's here!" returned the Indians, in tolerable good English.

"You can't come in; there's nobody in here wants to see you," was the response.

The six braves did not wait to parley. Instantly upon receiving answer they commenced a rapid backing away with their tomahawks, intending to cut through the door, and murder or make prisoners those who had defied them.

Upon each side of the door was a loop-hole, turning inward. Placing the muzzle of a pistol through one of these, Garvey pulled the trigger. There was a loud report, and a yell of pain from one of the Indians, who caught the ball in his side.

Simpkins, also, fired at the assaulting party, but failed to injure any of them. A moment later the forms of five Pawnees were seen dashing back to the forest like deer, while the wounded one crawled away slowly.

So silently had all the preparations been conducted thus far, that it was not till the first weapon was discharged that Cora or her mother awoke. Of course they were much frightened on finding that another contest with the savages

was about taking place, and they wrung their hands in wild apprehension till their fears were quieted by the men.

There was quiet among the Indians for some time after the braves returned from their task, and the occupants really began to think that the attack would be delayed until dark, or given over altogether. But the Indians realized that they were getting too near the borders to dally longer than was necessary. Presently a movement was discerned from the opposite direction, and something like a dozen Indians rushed out, paused a moment, then sought the nearest covers and began firing away.

The defenders crowded to that side, anxious to return the fire, as the Indians were so close that scarcely a shot could miss. But Sim Simpkins had fought Indians too often to be deceived in that manner. He merely said:

"Don't fire a gun. We want 'em all loaded. This is only tew cover up somethin' else. Keep a sharp lookout, and ye'll find use fer yer powder some other way. Keep yer guns ready and see that they don't play any tricks on yer."

As none wished to gainsay the veteran's word, they returned again to their positions, and waited the appearance of any savage from other quarters.

Just what the old scouts had anticipated was taking place. The Indians having made a mock attack, and fired steadily, their companions, to the number of twenty, had produced a long pole, quite heavy enough for its purpose, and were rushing on to destroy the door to the cabin. Of course the four men stationed at that side greeted them with the best of their skill. Yet the odds were great.

At the first discharge two of the warriors fell, and by the time the defenders had reloaded their pieces they were fearfully close. Three more went down before a close fire, and as Frank Sherman had an extra gun, he shot down another very speedily. There was a momentary pause, fresh hands were applied to the wooden ram, and then, amid the fierce cracking of pistols, and the fall of one or two more braves, came the first shock.

Simpkins had reloaded his rifle, and on seeing the state of affairs, sprung over to assist his companions. Quickly pulling away the bar and fastenings of the door, he raised the latch, saying to his confederates:

"Take the butts o' yer guns if ye want tew see fun!"

They partially comprehended his intention, and obeyed his bidding. As the rushing tramp of the savages was heard, and just before their weapons struck the door, the hunter swung it wide open.

The savages had intended a furious blow, and as they met no resistance, the result may be partially imagined. Scarcely one of the whole number maintained his equilibrium.

Before they could recover themselves, the whites were upon them, with vengeful yells, led on by the two veteran Indian-fighters. Depending solely upon the stocks of their rifles, the defenders struck right and left. So utterly astounded were the Pawnees, and so unlooked for any such proceeding, that they scarcely attempted resistance. Those who could avoid the death-

dealing blows, did so, and fled for the woods with wild howls.

The other parties, seeing or suspecting the turn affairs were taking, rushed on to assist their suffering brothers. They were too late. After a vain and foolish demonstration, which cost the life of one of them, they all returned to the woods, and a signal was given, calling the scattered members of the band together.

The time was occupied by the white men in reloading their pieces, and preparing in general for further fighting. Save one or two very slight wounds, none of the party had as yet been disabled.

The battle, the last and bloodiest, was ended!

The Indians, such as remained, finding themselves utterly unable to cope with the whites, gathered up a few of their most noted dead, and retired, wailing death-chants for those who had fallen.

The inmates of the cabin were somewhat suspicious that the absence was only temporary. But during the long hours of the afternoon they watched in vain for any signs of their return.

Night came on, and the best possible arrangements were made to guard against an attack. They hardly expected the night to pass without some disturbance, but when morning light came all was yet silent.

After breakfast, the entire party set out for the next settlement, Sam Garvey insisting upon bearing them company, and Sim Simpkins agreeing to return and spend a few days with his old companion.

The journey was made in safety, and at the village which they reached a company was organized to resist the rumored advance of the Indians. They were pleased at Sim's offer to guide them in pursuit of the savages, and at once set out. But the braves seemed satisfied with what they had failed to do, and the party found none of them. The bodies of the dead, which they had abandoned in their haste, were buried, and the settlers returned to their homes.

It was with moistened eyes that Sim Simpkins and the party he had saved parted. Thanks and blessings without number were pressed upon him, and Frank longed to ask his pardon for the momentary doubts he had entertained.

Luman Leonard and his family found an opportunity to settle where they were, and did so. Here they lived, and the last days of the men were better in some respects than the first.

Frank and Cora were married, of course, as all true lovers should be, and lived happily, relating to their children again and again the story of their salvation by Sim Simpkins the ONE-EYED HUNTER.

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